

Nechutová, Jana

**[Classics and Communism: Greek and Latin behind the Iron Curtain]**

*Graeco-Latina Brunensia*. 2015, vol. 20, iss. 1, pp. 178-181

ISSN 1803-7402 (print); ISSN 2336-4424 (online)

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/133974>

Access Date: 16. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

*l'Occident du II<sup>e</sup> s. av. J.-C. au II<sup>e</sup> s. apr. J.-C., Colloque de la SOPHAU, Lyon, 15–16 mai 2009, Pallas*, 80, 127–145.

Valmaña-Ochaíta, A. (2012). Electoral Strategy in the Ancient Rome: Case Study of Commentariolum Petitionis. *International Business & Economics Research Journal*, 11, 1549–1556.

Zenodocchio, S. (2008). *Antica viabilità in Abruzzo*. L'Aquila: Rea Edizioni.

*Loredana Cappelletti*

*Classics and Communism. Greek and Latin behind the Iron Curtain*. 2013. Edited by György Karsai, Gábor Klaniczay, David Movrin and Elżbieta Olechowska. Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete; Budapest: Collegium Budapest Institute for Advanced Study; Warsaw: Faculty of Artes Liberales. 576 pp., including illustrations. ISBN 978-961-237-601-7.

As noted in the introduction and editorial notes at the end of the book, the thick volume descriptively titled *Classics and Communism* came to life as part of the international research project “Gnóthi 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”. This 2009–2010 Focus Group project at Collegium Budapest aimed to explore the history of post-World War II classical philology in what were then the Socialist countries. Contributions also came from a Slovenian Research Agency project, the Department of Classical Philology at the University of Ljubljana Faculty of Arts, and the Faculty of Artes Liberales at the University of Warsaw. The research is directed at the life and work of prominent classicists. Its second phase, whose results will be presented in a proposed follow-up publication, broadens the focus to take in educational policy on teaching Latin and Greek and the popularisation of ancient history and theatre under Communism.

The book is divided into several sections of varying length: Soviet Russia, Central Europe, The Balkans. The last and shortest section is aptly entitled “A Crack in the Curtain”, by André Hurst. It describes Geneva’s Foundation Hardt. The foundation, particularly during Olivier Reverdins tenure as president starting in 1958, offered stipend-supported sabbaticals to Central and Eastern European classical philologists on good terms. These scholars’ opportunities to meet their colleagues from the capitalist world were otherwise meagre or even barred outright. They were also given access to the excellent resources of the library of the Foundation, a boon because it was ordinarily difficult-to-impossible to purchase specialised books or periodicals from the West or acquire them in any other manner.

In Chapter 1 of Section I on Soviet Russia, Olga Budaragina introduces the life and scientific career of Olga Friedenberg (1890–1955) and Aristid Ivanovich Dovatur (1897–1982), leading figures in classical philology at Leningrad University. Because as early as 1917, the Communist regime in Russia had seized power and begun to dominate the scholarly world, particularly in the humanities, Budaragina supplements her discussion of the years following World War II by presenting earlier developments. The story is a typical one, in which ideological and political pressure was exerted on humanities scholars by the totalitarian regime, forcing them into greater or lesser compromises. Because of this pressure, the leading

classicist Aristid Dovatur spent years in a labour camp and in exile. (He was rehabilitated after 1955). Alexander Gavrilov continues this theme in Chapter 2, describing the life of Jakov Borovskij, Russian Latin poet from the Soviet Union, who suffered a similar fate. In the final chapter of the first section, Chapter 3, Dmitri Panchenko provides information on Classics and Cultural Resistance in the Soviet Regime in the later period (1960s–1980s).

In Section II on Central Europe, Cornelia Isler-Kerényi describes the dramatic life story of Károly Kerényi, a Hungarian philologist, philosopher and religious studies scholar, in Chapter 4, entitled *An Unwilling Emigrant into European Classical Scholarship*. Chapter 5, by Péter Hajdu, presents the Case of Imre Trencsényi-Waldapfel (1908–1970). Trencsényi-Waldapfel is known to Czech cultural public particularly because of the translations of his Greek and Roman Mythology. Readers learn (p. 57) that “he became an enthusiastic, committed Communist. The new regime offered him brilliant career opportunities...”. The discussion of the situation in Hungary during that era then segues into the strong final Chapter 6, entitled “A Classical Philologist Trapped in the Web of the State Security: The Case of János Sarkady” (1927–2006). This story, and the documents and notes that accompany it, well illustrate the Soviet-inspired methodology used by state security units at the time. It is written by György Karsai.

Chapter 8 by Ludmila Buzássyová provides a detailed overview of classical philology in Slovakia both during and outside the Communist period. It begins with the period between the wars, around 1922–1923, when the classical philology seminar was instituted at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava (Chapter 9). The *Anatomy of a Revolution: Classics at the University of Ljubljana after 1945*, by David Movrin, unpacks the development of Slovenian classicist philology in the context of the cultural and political situation in former Yugoslavia, “one of the two European countries where the system was for the most part indigenous from the beginnings to the very end” (p. 141). Circumstances specific to the South Slavic region, that had forced Fran Bradač (1855–1976) from his post as head of Classics at the University of Ljubljana by 1945. Information about these specific circumstances usefully expands what is known about political and cultural developments in areas close to the Czech Republic. Later in the book, Chapter 15, by the same author, chronologically picks up the theme. It is entitled “Yugoslavia in 1949 and Its *Gratae Plenum*: Greek, Latin and the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers’ Parties (Cominform)”. This chapter, written around documents and citations, captures how top party organs (hence *Gratae Plenum* – the Plenum of the Central Committee) managed to create interference, particularly in the educational arena.

Classical Philology in Early Soviet Lithuania (10) is presented by Nikole Juchneviciene as an intellectual space between the European Tradition and Reality. Three very complicated geopolitical situations are involved – the independence of Lithuania, at least partially implemented claims by its stronger neighbours (Germany, Sweden, Russia and Poland) and, in the end, the Soviet invasion. Two universities are mentioned – those in Vilnius and Kaunas, the former established by 1569 during the Polish-Lithuanian Union. Czech readers, in particular, will appreciate the chapters to follow (Chapters 11–13) by Jerzy Axer, Elżbieta Olechowska, and Witold Wołodkiewicz. The first of these presents Kazimierz Kumaniecki (1905–1977), a professor at the University of Warsaw known for his work on Cicero and his effective efforts to preserve continuity in the tradition of Polish classical studies. Kumaniecki “played the role of leader and strategist” in the community of classical scholars in Poland. The author states: “Kumaniecki’s

political stance during the People's Poland was 'realistic' in the sense that, having decided to commit himself to grassroots work, he also decided to pay lip service in the form of highly restrained ... verbal tributes, with occasional satirical overtones". Bronislav Biliński was less known in post-war Czechoslovakia. He is characterised as "a Bolshevik without a Party Card". His truly meteoric academic career endured a tense relationship with Professor Kumaniecki. His career culminated with the position of Deputy-Rectorat (Vice Rector) at the University of Wrocław (1952–1954), a professorship at the University of Warsaw and a significant post in PAN (Polska Akademia Nauk). The last Polish figure presented is Rafał Taubenschlag, a specialist in Roman Law, a discipline not in favour with and not in the interests of those in power during that era. Czechs who remember the era may read Chapter 14, by Isolde Stark, aptly entitled "Johannes Irmischer's Unofficial Activity for the State Security of the German Democratic Republic", with a certain grim satisfaction. Fortunately there is a note on Prof. Elisabeth Charlotte Welskopf, who used to be well-known in the Czech Republic: "an ancient historian and Marxist who incidentally refused to leave the Mommsen Society, demonstrated that there was another way of advocating the preservation of classical studies" (p. 267).

Another, third section of the book is entitled "The Balkans". Chapter 16, written by Milena Jovanović and entitled "Classics in Serbia 1944–1945: The Case of Veselin Čajkanović" should also be noted. During the war, as part of purges of Titoism (courts of honour) this Professor at the University of Belgrade (1881–1946), Dean of its Faculty of Arts, was accused of war crimes, expelled from the University in 1945 and his civil rights were taken away. The chapter complements well the two chapters by David Movrin detailing the specifics of the early post-war development in Yugoslavia. However, Nikolai Gochev's Bulgarian article, entitled "Living with the Ancients", is unfortunately limited to a single personage, albeit one who was significant and representative: Vasilka Tapkova-Zaimova (\*1924), a graduate of classical philology in Sophia who devoted herself professionally to early Bulgarian history and Byzantine studies. (Czech philologists and historians of Antiquity maintained substantial contact both personally and professionally with Bulgarian philologists and renowned classical archaeologists, as noted in the article on Professor Tapkova-Zaimova). The final, very brief study (18) is an article by Alexandru Barnea entitled "Dionisie M. Pipidi and the Society for Classical Studies in Romania". (The only remaining chapter is Chapter 19 which, as mentioned above, focuses on the Foundation Hardt).

This brief description of the book shows that the task had not been assigned strictly and unambiguously to individual authors: some authors thoroughly described their fields using epical forms, others just provided a brief report; many accompanied their explanations with documents. Some authors were satisfied with an historical overview of classical disciplines in their countries during the era in question; others provided insight by presenting the leading figures whose lives embodied the developments studied. Sometimes a single leading figure was selected, other times several, allowing for gradation and, in some cases, emphasising contrast. Some areas were given more attention than others. The home countries of the project participants (Hungary, Poland and Soviet Russia, for other understandable reasons) have clearly been afforded more room.

So far, this review has ignored Chapter 7 of the book (p. 107–128). This chapter, meant to cover Czech classical philology during the period of Real Socialism, was written by Josef Moural. However, information on Czech classical philology or other disciplines of the study of Ancient Antiquity is not to be found here. This is a mistake, unfortunately now hard to

correct. There is a lot to tell readers, either by providing information on individual leading figures or by offering a general overview as in the Buzássyová paper on Slovak classical studies. Thus, two generations of Czech classical philology have been left out – those born in the generation from 1880 onward and those born in the 1920s. For example, information on an event as momentous as the *Antiquitas Graeco-Romana ac tempora nostra* conference, which took place in Brno in 1966 and was attended by many prestigious international scholars (from the West Roger Garaudy, a leading philosopher, George Thomson, a historian of Antiquity and John Chadwick, a renowned scholar in Mycenaean studies). Other chapters of the book mention Eirene, the East European Classical Association (which is a longtime member of the FIEC – International Federation of the Societies of Classical Studies). But it is not explained that Eirene originated in Prague. The name was initially given to an international scholarly journal first published in 1960 by the Department of Greek, Roman and Latin Studies at ČSAV (now the Department of Classical Studies at the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic) thanks to the efforts of Professor Antonín Salač. In the 1960s, Eirene, both the periodical and association, served as a go-between in a politically divided world between the Eastern Bloc and the West. The association (particularly the *Comitée Eirene*, which served as organiser, founded in 1957 in Liblice) coordinated a number of other international conferences with substantial participation. The seventeenth and final conference in the form of a Mycenaean colloquium took place in 1986. – Even among Czech classical philologists, there were personalities who were oppressed by the regime (e.g. Jiřina Vacková, Bohumil Ryba, Rudolf Mertlík).

The reviewer cannot account for this flaw in an otherwise excellent publication, only point it out as part of the review. The seventh chapter is entitled “Jan Patočka. A Bystander Turned Dissident”. In regard to Czech classical philology, there is an incomplete and imprecise statement concerning the reorganisation of Czech academic institutions and purges in the 1950s and 1970s. The study focuses exclusively on Jan Patočka. Patočka was undoubtedly the most important Czech philosopher of the 20th century and his name may be uttered in the same breath as that of T. G. Masaryk. He was not a classical philologist even if as a philosopher he dealt with Ancient Greek philosophers of the Attic and Hellenistic eras. The author of the chapter provides brief information on his philosophical contribution to the field, but it focuses on Patočka as the dissident and spokesman for Charter 77. The chapter uses the discussion of Patočka to focus on the Czech dissident community, as is also apparent from the photographic plates. These however have nothing to do with Czech classical philology or philosophy. Doubtless the international public should be informed about the Czech political situation and the protests of the dissident community against the normalisation ideology and political pressure. But this should be done (as it surely is) when and where it is appropriate. The text by Josef Moural gives the impression, that either post-war Czech classical studies simply did not exist, or that Josef Moural’s chapter made its way into this book by an editorial mistake.

*Jana Nechutová*