

Summary

Medieval Studies and Marxism

The transformation of the political situation after the end of World War II intervened in a significant way also in the fates and forms of historiography in Poland and Czechoslovakia. The rise of new political forces, which seized power unscrupulously, also had a fundamental effect on the new form of contemporary historiography. In the initial period, the main and practically the only possible interpretive approach was considered to be historical materialism, based on the views of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, V. I. Lenin and J. V. Stalin.

Historiography, which has fulfilled the role of an argument for presence since antiquity, gained in importance on the propagandistic level after 1945. Historians, who became the ideologues of the new regimes, were to discover the tradition of labourers' movements, the beginnings of the class struggle and the revolutionary resolutions of the class conflicts leading to the inevitable creation of a just and equal Communist society. The ideologues of historical materialism and Marxism-Leninism were primarily historians of modern history, mainly of the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. Nevertheless, because the so called people's democracies, swearing by the dream of Socialism in a kingdom of freedom, related in their radical historicism not only the recent past but also the Middle Ages, medieval studies were not spared the effects and influence of historical materialism.

The historiography at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century was centralised. In that centralisation, historical research, calling for

the revelation of historical regularity, which the alleged bourgeois historiography overlooked or obscured in its factual conception, was to devote itself to both science and the education of new, historically conscious generations. The scientific level was to be provided by a Soviet-style Academy of Sciences, in which institutes of history were among the largest and most influential. It is therefore surprising, in a way, that pure medievalists have headed the Institutes of History of the Academy of Sciences in Prague and Warsaw.

The book *Marxism and Medieval Studies: Common Fates?* originated at a workshop, which took place on 25 October 2019 and in which the Centre of Medieval Studies, Institute of Philosophy of the CAS, v. v. i., Institute of Contemporary History of the CAS, v. v. i., and Uniwersytet Warszawski participated within the Strategy AV 21 programme. The common denominator of the presented studies is Marxism and its influence on historical thought in the Czech and Polish milieus of the second half of the 20th century.

The authors, who contributed to this book, reflected not only on the implantation of historical materialism into research in medieval studies, into the selected topics, the approaches and interpretations, but they also ask whether Czech and Polish medieval studies have common fates in their relationship to Marxism in the second half of the 20th century or if, on the contrary, these medieval studies rather took their own independent paths. The institutional conditions support the idea that the fates must have been very similar in many respects. However, if we look at the Czech and Polish medieval studies of this period in more detail, a number of differences emerge. We find several reasons for this situation: a different reception of Marxism in the first half of the 20th century, a generation gap between individual coryphaei of historical research, the scientific activity of Marxist historians, who were not members of the Communist Party, the defeat or on the contrary victory of dogmatic Marxism at methodological conferences, the isolation or openness to Western medieval studies of Marxist and non-Marxist nature, etc. Despite these indisputable and very significant differences, however, there were many similarities: the imprisonment of medieval scholars for their political views, the dominance of medieval scholars in high positions, the overstressed anti-Germanism, etc. In addition, it is necessary to factor out the fact that in the 1950s and 1960s, Czech and Polish medievalists researched the same topics: the beginnings of the early medieval state, the modernization in the 13th century, the character and course of class struggles, the general or first crisis of the Middle Ages, the Hussites as an anti-feudal movement, etc.

The two initial contributions are devoted to the general framework of Marxist historiography in Poland after 1945. Rafał Stobiecki in his study *Marxist historiography in Poland* elaborates the thesis that Marxism represented the dominating and government-privileged way of thinking about history for forty years. However, it would in the author's opinion be simplification to reduce all of the historiography in the communist period to considerations of the consequences of the promotion of Marxist, better said Marxist-Leninist models, because unlike the Soviet Union and most of the other countries of the Eastern Bloc, Polish historiography did not acquire the state of the "only historiography" with the exception of the short period of so-called classical Stalinism (from the turn of the 1940s and 1950s up to 1956). After the October thaw in 1956, Marxism became, despite being powerfully supported by the state bodies, "only" one of the theoretical inspirations present in Polish historiography. Stobiecki in this context reflects on the influence of Marxism on the development of Polish historiography after World War II, on ways of understanding it and on the long-term consequences of the application of this model for historiographic practice.

Building on Stobiecki's text, Tadeusz P. Rutkowski in his treatise *Polish medieval studies in the face of Stalinism (1948-1955)* demonstrates that Polish medieval studies was significantly represented among the leading historians in the post-war period, which had a substantial impact on the form of Polish medieval history during the Stalinist period of 1948-1956. According to the author, the ideological pressure of the Communist authorities undoubtedly increased the influence of the historians (S. Arnold, E. Maleczyńska, K. Maleczyński, M. Małowist, J. Sieradzki) who were prepared to support the influence of Marxism in the historical community. However, the most important role was played by a group of researchers around Tadeusz Manteuffel, who managed to prevent the complete ideologization of Polish historiography. The form of Polish science was significantly influenced by a newly established institution (Kierownictwo Badań nad Początkami Państwa Polskiego), which was to coordinate the research of the beginnings of the Polish state, because in fact it managed to connect the truly scientific research into the history of material culture with the ideological needs of the state authorities. Ultimately, by engaging prominent scholars in this research (H. Łowmiański, K. Maleczyński, T. Manteuffel, K. Tymieniecki), it was possible to limit the negative impacts of government policy on the form of Polish science in 1948-1956.

In the Czech milieu, a specific problem was the penetration of Marxism into archaeological research. Jiří Macháček in his study *Marxists, pseudo-*

-Marxists and Neo-Marxists in Czech archaeology reflects on the diverse forms of its influence on archaeological interpretation. At the same time, he sets out five phases: the pre-Marxist period up to 1948; the early period of confused or naive pseudo-Marxists (J. Böhm et al.): 1948–1968; the normalization period of conformist pseudo-Marxists (B. Chropovský et al.): 1969–1989; the isolated appearance of authentic (“methodological”) Marxists (E. Neustupný, V. Nekuda, P. Charvát): 1961–1989; the post-Marxist and Neo-Marxist period: since 1989. In general, based on his own experience and considerations, he states that Marxism in many ways conforms to the archaeological approach of examining the past, because materialism is embedded in the very foundations of archaeological thought, which views human society through artefacts. In his opinion, it is mainly for these reasons that archaeology cannot remain resistant to Marxism.

The study by Piotr Węcowski *Between science and politics, between history and archaeology: The Management of Research on the Origins of the Polish State (1949-1953)* is devoted to the issue of state implantations into the research of the Early Middle Ages. The author predominantly focuses on the activity of Kierownictwo Badań nad Początkami Państwa Polskiego, the institution which was founded in connection with the preparation of the millennial anniversary of the emergence of the Polish state and developed its activity in 1948/1949-1953, i.e. at the time of the most intensive Stalinist terror in Poland. According to Węcowski, it was the largest humanities-orientated interdisciplinary project of Polish science in the 20th and 21st centuries. The head of this institution was the historian Aleksander Gieysztor along with the archaeologists Kazimierz Majewski and Zdzisław Rajewski. The aim of this institution was to introduce the Marxist method into Polish science and clearly prove the Slavic past of Silesia and Pomerania, the territories annexed to Poland in 1945. Despite intensive attempts to use the institution’s activities in party propaganda, the archaeologists and historians managed to preserve its scientific character and not succumb to external pressures. Although a wide range of the historians and archaeologists who participated in its work professed and promoted Marxism, researchers thinking in other ways were not excluded from its activities. Even in this high-ideological period, it was still a haven for a number of scientists persecuted by the Communist regime.

Marxism left a significant imprint in the study of the nobility, namely both in the Czech and Polish milieus. The study by Andrzej Marzec *Medieval knightly families as the subject of criticism of Marxist historiography in the 1950s* sets its aim to trace the genesis of the interpretation of the

term “knightly families” in Polish historiography with an emphasis on the different interpretations and disputes among the researchers. For many researchers of the Stalinist period, the knighthood became the personification of feudalism, from which it arose that it was generally interpreted negatively. The study by Robert Novotný *Enemies of the state, enemies of the people, enemies of the revolution: The nobility in Marxist medieval studies* also deals with the negative image of the nobility, which the Czech Marxist historiography of the 1950s assigned to it mainly in relation to the pre-revolutionary society and to the Hussite revolution. In this context, he deals in detail with the inspirational sources of interpretation of František Graus and especially Josef Macek, as well as the collapse of the interpretive model, developed by these two coryphes of Marxist historiography. For the later period, Novotný points out the attempt to transform the study of the nobility into so-called Marxist nobilitology in the 1970s and 1980s. He considers Miloslav Polívka’s inadvertent questioning of the theory of the pauperization of the nobility to be a surprising consequence of the Marxist approach to the history of the nobility in the period.

The sovereign’s milieu, which clashed with the nobility for power in the 14th century, is devoted a study entitled *The position of the ruler in the opinion of Polish Marxist historiography* by Bożena Czwojdrak. In her text, the author reveals how Polish historians manoeuvred between Marxist ideology, which puts the emphasis on the masses in opposition to individuals, and analytical research aimed at the actions of the sovereigns, or at the transformation of their position in late medieval society. As an example of the researchers who submitted to the official Marxist ideology, she presents Ewa Maleczyńska, who with this attitude called into question her own pre-war research. However, despite the preference for the historical role of the masses in historiography, some Polish rulers were evaluated positively, for example Władysław Jagiełło, who was generally celebrated as the victor over the Order of the Teutonic Knights. Other rulers, such as Casimir the Great, although praised for some of their actions, could not be evaluated positively because they pursued an expansionary policy toward medieval Russia.

The reader is introduced into the milieu of the rural classes by the study by Piotr Guzowski *Peasants, rents and money in the Marxist descriptions of German colonization*. The author deals with the Marxist method of interpreting the modernization of peasant economies in connection with the rise and development of German law. Guzowski starts from an analysis of the work of Z. Kaczmarczyk and M. Szaniecki *Colonization under Teutonic law in Poland and the development of feudal rent* from 1951, which was

based on the Marxist theory of the function of feudal rent. He considers the reception of the ideologized model presented in this book, in numerous studies and monographs concerning German colonization and the rural economy, and states both its blind acceptance and its critical reflection or open rejection.

Marxist methodology penetrated the Czech and Polish milieus though Soviet impulses. It is fully the case for the topic of the early bourgeois revolution. Martin Nodl in his study *Hussitism as an early bourgeois revolution* demonstrates in what way precisely the Soviet debate on the character of the German Peasants' War and the German Reformation influenced the thinking of the Czech philosopher and historian Robert Kalivoda. In his revisionist reading of Engels, he came to the conclusion that the Hussite revolution fulfilled all aspects of the early bourgeois revolution and that it should be placed in the same phase of bourgeois revolutions as the German Reformation. Kalivoda's views clashed both with the interpretations of Czech medievalists and especially with the ideas of the East German medievalist, for whom the topic of the German Reformation and the German Peasants' War as an early bourgeois revolution became a major and fundamental influence on the whole East German historiographical discourse from the beginning of the 1960s. The emphasis on the uniqueness of the German Reformation in turn led to an (almost) collective rejection of Kalivoda's interpretations in East Germany.

Jitka Komendová studies another aspect of Soviet medieval studies in her treatise *Marxism and the cultural history of the medieval Russia: The concept of Russian pre-Renaissance*. The author states the influences of Marxism on the production of Dmitry Sergeyeovich Likhachov, who interpreted the cultural history of medieval Russia of the 14th-15th centuries as so-called pre-Renaissance. Likhachov first mentioned the concept of a Russian pre-Renaissance in the mid-1940s, when he linked it to the Stalinist thesis of Muscovite Russia as a "unified Russian nation-state". In the post-Stalin era, Likhachov modified his concept and firmly linked it to the interpretation of universal history of N. I. Konrad. Within this Marxist framework, Likhachov's concept of pre-Renaissance survived without significant changes until the 1990s. Only then did Likhachov's promoters try to break it out of the Marxist paradigm, but the whole concept lost its original theoretical basis and interpretive logic.

Special emphasis was predominantly put on the Marxist study of the history of Silesia in the Polish milieu in the 1950s. The last two studies in this book are devoted to this issue, which point to the pitfalls of these new, or sometimes only apparently new, readings and interpretations. Przemysław

Wiszewski in his study *How did the Czech Hussites become a current problem in the history of Socialist Poland? Ewa Maleczyńska and the presence of the Hussites in Silesia* deals with the person of the Wrocław medievalist Ewa Maleczyńska in the 1940s and 1950s. Maleczyńska then appeared as the leading Polish expert on Hussitism, who attributed a clearly class character to this anti-feudal movement. Nevertheless, in connection with her concept of Hussitism, Wiszewski aptly draws attention to the transformations in her views on the national character of this revolutionary movement. At the end of the 1950s, however, the author stopped devoting herself to the Hussites, according to Wiszewski, probably because she was aware of the influence of the Stalinist way of thinking on her own interpretations. In his study *Between nationalism and Marxism: The Silesian dukes of the Late Middle Ages through the lens of post-war Polish historiography*, David Radek looks at the Silesian topic through a somewhat different lens. At the centre of his interest are the historians (E. Maleczyńska, K. Maleczyński, R. Heck and others), working at the university in Wrocław, which became the main centre of the research of Silesian history in post-war Poland. Although Marxism was the dominant theoretical starting point of the view of Polish history, Radek provides an analysis of the works of the Wrocław historians and tries to prove that despite the Marxist rhetoric in their case it was not a distinctive interpretive shift from the earlier research, which was significantly influenced by nationalism and Polish-German antagonism. The emphasis on intellectual continuity with pre-war Polish historiography thus to some extent calls into question the generally widespread notions of the markedly Marxist character of medieval studies in Wrocław in the 1950s.

The book *Marxism and Medieval Studies: Common fates?* certainly does not address the relationship between Marxism and medieval studies in the Czech and Polish milieus in a comprehensive way. The individual studies only touched upon some, albeit carefully selected topics, which in some aspects reflect the similarity or on the contrary the difference of the common fates. Nevertheless, despite this limitation, the presented investigation of the issue of the penetration and reception of Marxism in medieval research offers new possibilities for critical reflection of the unjustly forgotten chapter of Czech and Polish historiography of the 20th century.