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[REVIEW]: *Marxism and Medieval Studies. Marxist Historiography in East-Central Europe*, ED. BY M. NODL, P. WĘCOWSKI, D. ZUPKA, EAST CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE IN THE MIDDLE AGES, 450–1450, 93, BRILL, LEIDEN – BOSTON 2024, PP. 391.

Coming to terms with the scholarly impact of Marxism in the medievalist historiographies of Central European countries is an important task, the complexity of which goes beyond the evaluation of research methodologies and academic achievements. The historiographer must deal here with historians living for four decades in a political system, state socialism, which tried to impose Marxism as a philosophically articulated and ideologically biased framework of their scholarly production. Some embraced this ideology with genuine conviction, others came under its spell for a while and then got disillusioned from it, still others seemingly accepted its domination as a strategy of survival and added the necessary (Marx, Lenin, Stalin) quotations (the ‘red tail’ as it was contemptuously called in Hungary) to works of neutral, specialized scholarship. Those who entirely refused to obey the pressure were pushed to the periphery of academic life, excluded from academies, universities and research institutes. But among them some were lucky to be supported by the solidarity of colleagues and could remain active despite the unfavourable conditions. The work of ‘socialist historians’ often received privileged political attention, new academic research institutes were founded to support their self-conscious striving to rectify the “erroneous” interpretations of ‘bourgeois historical science’. At the same time, looking back to that period, one must recognize that

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academic scholarship – and within it medieval studies – has produced also significant results during the four decades dominated by Marxism in these countries. Costly archaeological excavations, ambitious source editions, extensive synthetic overviews were funded, and some grand historians could use these resources without letting them distort their achievements.

The initiative of organizing a comparative assessment how medieval studies fared in Central Europe during the domination of Marxism is very welcome and highly timely. More than three decades have passed since the change of the system; there appeared several historiographic overviews of the recent past in the individual countries of Central Europe, but these remained confined in their national sphere, no effort has been made so far to compare the varieties of this experience. In addition, a comparative overview could help to dissolve the *damnatio memoriae* that stigmatized the entire scholarship of this period in the eyes of recent generations.

The core of the studies in the present book stems from a workshop organized in Prague in 2019 confronting the Czech and the Polish milieu. The discussions there proposed the enlargement of the circle and include in the resulting volume further historiographic essays on Hungarian, Romanian, Slovak and Yugoslav medieval studies. East Germany was more or less excluded from this group, because of the special agenda of Marxist medieval studies there, immersed in permanent polemics with West German colleagues. The volume contains seventeen essays discussing the influence of Marxism on historical, archaeological and art historical studies related to the Middle Ages: seven on Polish, four on Czech, two on Hungarian, and one on Slovak, Romanian, Yugoslav and Russian medieval studies. The editors, Martin Nodl, Piotr Węcowski and Dušan Zupka stress in their introduction and conclusion that a synthetic overview could not be attempted here. This volume proposes rather case studies with a multiplicity of possible approaches to the problem.

Rafał Stobiecki's essay introduces the series with a *longue durée* overview of Polish historiography after 1945. The initial attractiveness of the Marxist vision of history resided in its attention to economic and social history instead of political history and the elites. The impact of Stalinization between 1948 and 1956 compromised the inspirations of this methodology by making it more or less obligatory. After October

1956, however, several varieties emerged in the use of Marxism: among them an “orthodox”, Poznań-based group (Jerzy Topolski, Adam Schaff) and a Warsaw School of “revisionist” historians and philosophers (Leszek Kołakowski, Bronisław Baczko) who emigrated after 1968. An increased dialogue started with the French *Annales* circle (Fernand Braudel, Jacques Le Goff) who integrated Polish – once Marxist – medievalists in their methodological debates on ‘nouvelle histoire’ (Krzysztof Pomian, Bronisław Geremek). There were theoretically minded economic historians in whose work Marxism was just a remote background (Witold Kula), and the ideological-theoretical ‘historiosophical’ aspect disappeared from the bulk of historical research, returning to a closer exploration of the sources. Though Stobiecki excuses himself for providing only a ‘bird’s-eye view’, this differentiated Polish panorama provides an excellent framework for the studies included in the volume.

The two studies by Tadeusz Paweł Rutkowski and Piotr Węcowski complete this image by describing in detail the new academic institutions emerging in the post-war years: the reorganization of the universities, the Institute of History of the Soviet-style academy, and the large Department for Studies on the Origins of the Polish State (DSOPS). They point out, that despite the increasing pressure of the Communist takeover and notwithstanding the influence of some enthusiastically Marxist historians (such as Stanisław Arnold and Ewa Maleczyńska), the directors of these new institutions, Aleksander Gieysztor for the DSOPS and Tadeusz Manteuffel for the Institute of History at the Polish Academy of Sciences managed to promote true historical scholarship, and skilfully navigate their institutions without yielding to official ideological demands. The special investment into the archaeology and the history of the origins of the Polish state had certainly its own function: justifying the new geographical extensions of Poland after the Second World War, providing ample data that Silesia belonged to the original Polish state. Although this issue had little to do with the Marxist vision of history, the medieval history of Silesia became an ideologically privileged subject. David Radek described how the evaluation of Silesian princes oscillated ‘between nationalism and Marxism’ and Przemysław Wiszewski analyzed the work of Ewa Maleczyńska, who directed attention to Silesian Hussites, prominent representatives of medieval class struggles, dear to the Marxist historians. Two more Polish contributions also handled issues where the research themes aligned with the Marxist

vision of social history: Andrzej Marzec wrote on medieval knight clans and Piotr Guzowski on how the changes of the peasant rent types could be put in relation with the German colonisation.

Compared with the systematic presentation of the Polish scene, the Czech contributions bring only four case studies. Martin Nodl wrote a very detailed, excellent overview of the most central theme of Marxist interpretation of medieval Czech history: Hussitism. The Czech philosopher and historian of ideas, Robert Kalivoda provoked long-lasting debates by his thesis qualifying the Hussite movement as an 'early bourgeois revolution', boldly revising the thesis of Engels on the German Peasants' War, getting into conflict with Josef Macek, the principal Marxist expert of the Hussites at home and several Soviet and East German medievalists abroad.

A second case study is offered by Martin Wihoda who described the biographically founded intellectual trajectory of František Graus, one of the zealous protagonists of Marxist historiography in Czechoslovakia in the early 1950s, writing influential studies on the late medieval 'crisis of feudalism', but in the 1960s abandoning Marxism and as a 1968 émigré, becoming a respected medievalist in Germany and Switzerland. Wihoda analyses how the concepts of Graus evolved on the responsibilities of historians towards the 'living past', but to me this portrait seems incomplete without the mention of his pathbreaking, non-Marxist monograph on rulership (*Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger*, 1965) still written in Czechoslovakia, or all his books written in exile.

The archaeologist Jiří Macháček offers a concise and witty typology of the various ways principal archaeologists adhered to Marxism in the different periods of the four decades under consideration: confused or naïve pseudo-Marxists, conformist pseudo-Marxists, isolated authentic Marxists and neo-Marxists. This is paired with the detailed discussion of one case: the heated debate between Jaroslav Böhm, ranged by Macháček to the first group, and Graus on the problem whether one can call Great Moravia a 'feudal state'. Two Czech art historians also contributed to the volume: Tereza Johanidesová on the Prague school of 'Marxist iconology' and Jitka Komendová on the concept of Russian Pre-Renaissance.

As mentioned at the beginning of this review, the studies resulting from the Polish-Czech workshop were complemented by several

additional overviews. The two Hungarian essays, by Attila Pók and Gábor Thoroczkay took the invitation seriously: they provided a balanced panorama of all the principal Marxist representatives of Hungarian medieval studies during the four decades of state socialism, characterizing their different and changing relationship with this ideological framework, and their close exchanges with the *Annales* circle. They also dwelt with the principal theoretical discussions they started on the Central European varieties of feudalism (Zsigmond Pál Pach, László Makkai), on nationalism versus class struggles (Erik Molnár, Jenő Szűcs), and the “belated” socio-economic development related to the problem of historical regions (also Jenő Szűcs). They also added to this panorama, how badly fared in the 1950s the prime Hungarian representative of sociological history, István Hajnal, who did not adhere to Marxism.

The Marxist period of the Slovak, Romanian and Yugoslavian medieval studies is illustrated by several examples from archaeology. Adam Hudek wrote on the Marxist evaluation of the excavations related to Great Moravia. Iure Stamati provides a detailed history of the changing archaeological views in Romania in the 1950s and 1960s, from enthusiastic followers of the Stalinist linguist Marr (later disavowed), and from the initial Soviet-inspired focus upon the remains of Slavic elements to the concentration of research on Daco-Roman archaeology – interpreted with historical categories of Marxism.

The most comprehensive essay on archaeology was written by Florin Curta, who juxtaposed the academic career of four female archaeologists in the period: Ludmila Kraskovská (Czech of Lithuanian origin), Mirjana Ćorović-Ljubinković and Paola Korosec (Yugoslav), and Tatiana Stefanovičová (Slovak). His detailed biographical and professional portraits, showing how three of these four leading female archaeologists could retain their position with very little tribute to Marxism, give an illustration of the need of closer in-depth examination of this period with its contradictory but valuable academic legacy.

Concluding this review, one might say that the assembly of these case studies on the relation of medieval studies and Marxism in six East-Central European studies is very inspiring. With the variety of its approaches paves the way for a systematic, comparative overview of this domain. Let me mention here a few of the associations that emerged from its reading. Obviously, a similar detailed overview of the historiography of the whole period, as provided by Rafał Stobiecki for

Poland and Attila Pók for Hungary, would be desirable for Czechoslovakia (and Romania, and Yugoslavia) as well. On the whole, while the Stalinist period received more attention in the volume, the long period between 1956 and 1990, with the representatives of a more consolidated, theoretically and scholarly more elaborated Marxist historiography would merit more detailed evaluation.

The complexity of the adherence or the resistance to the impact of Marxism in this four-decades-long historical period is best illustrated by the detailed intellectual biographies of important protagonists, as provided in the volume of Ewa Maleczyńska, František Graus, István Hajnal or the four Czechoslovak and Yugoslav female archaeologists. This raises the desire to complement these portraits by several others: those of the partially presented Aleksander Gieysztor, Josef Macek, Jenő Szűcs or those barely mentioned such as Bronisław Geremek and František Šmahel – just to name a few.

Further inspiring ideas emerging from the volume could be enumerated here: the fruitful pairing of the two disciplines of history and archaeology and the two isolated examples from art history indicate that the study of the influence of Marxism has to be paired with an interdisciplinary vision of medieval studies, where further disciplines, such as literary studies, philosophy or economic history would be also welcome. The insights of the detailed presentation of the debates on Hussitism by Czech, Soviet, Polish, and East German historians (where I would add the Hungarian György Székely as well) prompts the desire to further examine the polemics on other important medieval subjects between the Marxist historians of these countries, promoted regularly by two-sided ‘mixed commissions’, joint workshops, anniversary conferences. All these suggestions are inspired by the merits and the usefulness of this collection of studies.