

*Robert A. Sucharski*

ORCID 0000-0001-7708-7173

University of Warsaw

## A FEW WORDS IN WAY OF INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage and tradition, and the sense of identity that stems from them, have been among the fundamental research problems for the scholars associated with the Faculty of “Artes Liberales” at the University of Warsaw since the dawn of its existence. The aim inscribed already in the name of the Center for Studies on the Classical Tradition in Poland and Central-Eastern Europe at the University of Warsaw (OBTA UW) – an institution established on December 19, 1991, and a predecessor of today’s Faculty – required, and still requires, active efforts to establish an international network of institutions of higher education that would encompass also countries lying to the east of Poland, especially those united with it by common heritage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów) of the Jagiellonians and elective kings. The first volume in the working paper series *Łacina w Polsce* [Latin in Poland], titled *Między Slavia Latina i Slavia Orthodoxa* [Between the Slavia Latina and the Slavia Orthodoxa], opens with an introduction by Professor Jerzy Axer, the originator and

long-time Director of the OBTA UW, then (since January 23, 2008) Director of its successor, the Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies “Artes Liberales” at the University of Warsaw (IBI AL UW), and after the latter was transformed into the present Faculty (October 1, 2012) – its first Dean. In the introduction, we read:

The purpose of our interdisciplinary and long-term research program is to create an extensive collection of documents and literary texts written in Latin, of readings which can bring back to the national memory a set of experiences that have largely been forgotten and at the same time – to introduce into the international academic circulation knowledge about the eastern peripheries of the historically shaped community of Latin-speaking European elites. This purpose, however, can only be sensibly pursued when perceiving the Polish Latinness in a broader context of the Latinness of the entire region; what is more, we must not forget even for a moment the peculiar dialogue and confrontation between the Latin element and the world of Byzantine tradition (Axer 1995, 7–8).

By and large immediately, this idea found its reflection in the International School of Humanities (MSH). This project – planned for many years ahead and still operating in a somewhat altered form – has three basic goals:

- to create a cooperative network of Central and Eastern European academic institutions;
- to popularize modern theories and methodologies in the human sciences and – above all – to offer support to young scholars representing the fields that were underrated in many countries of the region (especially the USSR), but which were and remain of crucial importance to the revival of the humanities; and consequently,
- to create an international and interdisciplinary community, capable of cooperation, and as a result – to eliminate the

vacuum which might get filled by an ideology of primitive nationalism along with ethnocentric delusions and clichés.

To follow these premises means to educate specialists in the common history of the region, questions of cultural heritage, translation studies, linguistics, publishing technologies, archival science, classical languages, and so forth. It also means to resist the trend, predominant in the 1990s, of teaching law, economy, management and business administration, or applied social science... The MSH has remained one of the very few international programs addressed to humanists, and the only one to stress the importance of the Mediterranean tradition in the region. Now run by the Faculty, the School emphasizes the need for humanist education for the specific reason that it is such education alone that may consolidate the intellectual communities which could be leaders for the civil society and play an especially important role in promoting the national tradition and fostering historical memory, and therefore forming the public opinion in the countries of the region.

The MSH is intended for young academics, including doctoral students and people working on their postdoctoral/habilitation dissertations. The participants are selected in a competition, with candidates who come from all Central and Eastern European countries and fall into one of the following categories:

- young scholars from universities and academies of sciences who hold teaching positions or are serving teaching internships;
- researchers from archives and libraries who also teach at institutions of higher education;

- fourth- and fifth-year students of the institutions which allow the inclusion of MSH-taught courses in their students' curricula;
- by way of exception, students of earlier years at special request of their schools' presidents (this was associated with reforms in the curricula of the humanities programs in progress at the school in question);
- by way of exception, scholars from the US and Western Europe who specialize in topics associated with Central and Eastern Europe.

The importance of this project was soon recognized, owing to which the MSH could count on financial and organizational support from both the University of Warsaw (organizing the MSH is one of the elements in the fulfilment of the Faculty's goals of offering interdisciplinary and interfield courses and research in the area of human and social sciences, including especially the broadly understood classical – Greek, Roman, and Byzantine – tradition, and is listed as such in the Faculty Rules and Regulations) and numerous benefactors from Poland, Europe, and America.

Also relatively soon, it turned out that these goals can likewise be realized by methods different from those standardly applied at the MSH – namely, by organizing short, usually month-long, sessions, during which the participants undergo intensive training under the supervision of their academic tutors; then, having returned to their home institutions, the participants carry out more or less broadly defined research tasks. Thus, on the initiative of Professor Jan Kieniewicz, within the

Transdisciplinary Inter-Faculty Doctoral Programme – run jointly by the Faculty of “Artes Liberales” and the Faculty of History, University of Warsaw – a special module was introduced, called “Searching for Identity.” The doctoral students who partook in it came from Poland, Ukraine as well as from European and Asian (Siberian) parts of the Russian Federation. The participation of students from outside Poland was made possible by the AURORA and WEBB Projects with the EU Erasmus Mundus Program.

The “Searching for Identity” Project has come to completion – it produced several excellent doctoral dissertations; this volume presents some of the works by its participants. The project’s main premise was to allow the students to engage in a free dialogue in the spirit of mutual respect, which often runs counter to one’s own identity. In a hierarchical world that is academia, engaging in a conversation that stems from one’s sense of identity, and (a much more difficult task) being able to defend it, see it through the eyes of others, and thus allow for its potential redefinition, requires from the participants not only particular tactfulness but above all adopting dialogicality as the fundamental principle of such endeavor. Here, we come back to the general need for a humanist education that forms and consolidates intellectual communities in a given country or, more broadly, in the region and globally. The dialogical principle is especially important in the context of our region of the world, where we often find ourselves dealing with historical resentments, while ethnic, confessional and linguistic identity is perhaps the most important determinant of nationality. However,

in the peculiar context of academia, dialogicality is also important in research work: it enables one to transgress the confines of narrowly defined scientific disciplines, as it opens up the academic discussion to new methodologies and perspectives. In other words, it favors inter- and transdisciplinarity.

Given all this, the Faculty's engagement in Open Society Foundations' Global Dialogues Program is hardly surprising. Though the beneficiary of the OSF grant is its close collaborator, the "*Artes Liberales* Institute" Foundation (FIAL), the Faculty of "*Artes Liberales*" provides the participants with academic supervision as well as opportunities for academic contact. Four postdoctoral researchers from Ukraine took part in the first, one-semester-long phase of the project (2016–2017), while four postdoctoral researchers from Belarus partook in the second phase (2018–2019). The program offers support to researchers who specialize in broadly defined human and social sciences and are open to interdisciplinarity and, furthermore, aware of the responsibility falling on the academic world due to its presence in society. The articles presented in this volume are meant to document also this kind of social responsibility of academia.

In a world where access to information is no longer a problem – on the contrary, what has become problematic is excess of information and the resulting need for selectiveness – a dialogical, interdisciplinary and socially responsible academic thinking is a necessity.

*Translated by Jakub Ozimek*

**REFERENCES**

Axer, Jerzy, ed. 1995. *Między Slavia Latina i Slavia Orthodoxa* [Between the Slavia Latina and the Slavia Orthodoxa]. Vol. 1–2 of *Łacina w Polsce: Zeszyty naukowe*. Warszawa: OBTA.