

## Borders, Borderlands, Language

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# Borders, Borderlands, Language

Culture and Society in the Slavic World  
through the Centuries

*Edited by*

Monika Saczyńska-Vercamer, Ales Zářický



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# By Way of an Introduction: The Slavic World – East Central Europe as a Borderland

*Monika Saczyńska-Vercamer*

'My grandmother Maria Czyż née Chmiel did not like travelling.  
She had never been to Warsaw, she had never seen the sea.  
She was abroad, because the borders themselves,  
be they Czech, German or Austrian, time and again in this century  
passed over the threshold or just beyond the threshold of the house'<sup>1</sup>

'As a Swede you are a Luther, and as a Luther you are a German.  
So it follows that you are, like me, a Pole.  
They take me for a German too, even though I, together with my co-religionists,  
I have laid many a cornerstone of Polishness.'<sup>2</sup>

Neither East nor West; a little East, and a little West. East Central Europe is not only a geographical concept, although it refers to the geographical location of a space situated in a specific geopolitical system, between different political organisms. It is also a space stretching between the cultural areas of the 'West' and the 'East', drawing influences from both of them, shaped by both of them, and finally opposing both of them and turning to the search for and cultivation of its own identity. It is not easy to describe the phenomenon of East Central Europe, but – and this should be emphasised with great satisfaction – historians have been working intensively on this issue for several decades, and East Central Europe is increasingly present in European historiography. The subject is a guest at international congresses of the historical sciences. Synthetic projects, both popular and strictly scientific, are undertaken to describe the uniqueness and peculiarity of this region.<sup>3</sup> There are also separate formats dedicated exclusively to East Central Europe, such as the Medieval Central Europe Research Network (MECERN), which is a semi-formal interdisciplinary network of scholars, students and interested researchers that supports the

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1 Pilch, J., *Bezpowrotnie utracona leworęczność* (Cracow: 2008) 143.

2 Pilch, J., *Spis cudzołożnic. Proza podróżna* (Cracow: 2002) 188.

3 For Instance: Cevins, M.-M. de (ed.), *Démystifier l'Europe centrale. Bohême, Hongrie et Pologne du VIIe au XVIe siècle* (Paris: 2021); Zečević, N. – Ziemann, D. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Central Europe* (New York: 2022).

research and the dissemination of knowledge of medieval Central Europe. The biennial MECERN congresses are important events and have already become a permanent feature in the scientific calendar of medieval studies. However, further initiatives show that the subject matter is far from being complete.

During discussions at the Committee on Slavic and East European Studies of the Committee on Historical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences (after the recent changes in the Academy in 2024 – the Section), the idea of taking a closer look at the specifics of the Slavic world was born. This coincided with preparations for the XXII<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Historical Sciences in Poznań, which was finally held in 2022<sup>4</sup>. The session ‘Borders and Borderlands: Slavdom over the Centuries – Culture and Society’, organised by the Commission for Slavonic and East European Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Faculty of History of the University of Ostrava (in charge: Monika Saczyńska-Vercamer and Aleš Zářycký), was included into the programme of the Congress. The limited time given for speeches did not allow for an in-depth development of the subject matter, so already during the preparations for the Congress the idea was conceived to prepare a volume in which eminent specialists would be able to discuss the issue against a broad background. Historians dealing with different eras were invited to develop the topic. It must be emphasised that the Centre for Historical Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Berlin, and particularly its director, Igor Kąkolewski, played an important role at this stage. Thanks to expert consultation and professional assistance, it was possible to enlarge the group of invited specialists. The task given to the authors was not an easy one: to look at East Central Europe (Slavic Europe) and its specifics, understood as a cultural borderland, but also as a region internally marked by borders (both political and social). The key to these considerations was to be the language(s).

## Borders

‘East Central Europe (östliches Mitteleuropa) can be understood both as a border region (Grenzraum) between the West and the European East and as an intermediate space (Zwischenraum) between East and West, between Germany

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4 The congress was originally scheduled for 2020, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic it was first postponed to 2021 and then by one more year. These disturbances also affected the implementation of related projects.

and Russia or the Soviet Union,’ as Joachim von Puttkamer wrote.<sup>5</sup> It is therefore a region: *Grenzraum* and *Zwischenraum* stretching between – taking into account the different political organisms over a long period of time – the Latin West represented by the German states (the Empire, the Reich, Germany) and the Orthodox East represented by Byzantium and, from a certain point on, the Grand Duchy of Moscow, Russia and finally the Soviet Union. It was also not without influence from the Tartars and the Golden Horde and the Ottoman Empire, a kind of personification of the ‘East’ originating from the interior of exotic Asia. The boundaries are fluid. In its broadest sense, East Central Europe encompasses, in addition to Poland, Czech, Hungary, Slovakia and Austria (in their various – over the centuries – political forms), the Baltic states, Belarus and Ukraine, South-Eastern Europe and the Balkans, as well as Brandenburg-Prussia and, in the second half of the 20th century, even the GDR, although the presence of the GDR within the borders of East Central Europe was questionable.<sup>6</sup> However, the concept of East Central Europe itself is relatively new in historiography.

In the middle of the 19th century, during the Spring of Nations, the Austrian politician Karl Ludwig von Bruck (1798–1860) and the economist Lorenz von Stein (1815–1890) created the term ‘Mitteleuropa’, by which they meant the united economic space of the German-speaking region. This resonated with the Pangermanic community, politically dominated by two political organisms, Prussia and Austria. After the Prussian-Austrian War of 1866 the concept evolved in two directions. This was one of the consequences of the changes in the political situation that occurred. The reason for the conflict was the rivalry between Prussia and Austria for the presidency of the German Union. This clash culminated in a victory for Prussia, significant territorial acquisitions for Prussia and, above all, a change of policy for Austria, which withdrew from German politics (the dissolution of the German Union and in its place the establishment of the North German Union – 1866, an important step in the unification of Germany – 1871 – and the establishment of the German Empire). In Austria, the concept of ‘Mitteleuropa’ was limited to a zone of Habsburg interests, the axis of which was the Danube and the Ottoman/post-Ottoman Balkans (the so-called *Große Deutsche Lösung*). In Prussia, on the other hand,

5 „Das östliche Mitteleuropa lässt sich gleichermaßen als Grenzraum des Westens gegenüber dem europäischen Osten wie als Zwischenraum zwischen Ost und West, zwischen Deutschland und Russland bzw. der Sowjetunion verstehen.“. See: Puttkamer, J. von, „Ostmitteleuropa“, in *Europäische Geschichte Online (EGO)*, ed. by Leibniz-Institut für Europäische Geschichte (IEG) (Mainz: 2014). URL: <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/puttkamerj-2014-de> [2024-12-20].

6 Puttkamer, „Ostmitteleuropa“ [2024-12-20].

the term was understood as a region shifted decisively northwards towards the Baltic Sea and parts of the Russian Empire (the so-called *Kleindeutsche Lösung*), which was linked to Prussian interests and included Prussian colonisation projects (*Drang nach Osten*). Present in both concepts was the idea of Germanisation, understood as a tool through which the strongest ethnic group in the area – the Germanic one – subjugated weaker non-Germanic groups, i.e. primarily various ethnic Slavic groups.

In 1915. By the term 'Mitteleuropa' Friedrich Neuman (1860–1919) understood the economic region inhabited by the *Wirtschaftsvolk* economically linked to Germany. He saw this economic region under German hegemony as a war objective for the Central Powers. This resounded with the idea of an area of German expansion based on German minorities and German cultural traditions. This idea found its continuation in the 1920s and 1930s in the *Ostforschung* and eventually resulted in the National Socialist General Plan East (*Generalplan Ost*).

After the end of the First World War the new political situation in this part of Europe – the rise of a belt of independent states stretching from Finland to Greece – also influenced changes in the perception of both its political role and its place in historiography. The Central European region gained importance as a kind of buffer defending Western Europe against Communist Russia. At the same time, historians of the countries of the region began to study intensively the issue of the place of this part of Europe in the history of the continent. Cooperation was established between virtually all countries of the region, resulting in the creation in 1927 of the Federation of Historical Societies of Eastern Europe (the original name was in French: 'Fédération des Sociétés Historiques de l'Europe Orientale'; it was active until 1939) with its headquarters in Warsaw. The term 'Eastern Europe' (l'Europe Orientale) was used in the name, as there was no other at the time, but it immediately triggered heated discussions. The research undertaken was presented in the Society's bulletin (1928–1939), and subjects related to this part of Europe, as a separate issue, were introduced to the international forum: the congress of the Comité International des Sciences Historiques / International Committee of Historical Sciences (CISH/ISHS): Brussels (1923), Oslo (1929), Warsaw (1933) and Zurich (1939). At the Warsaw congress a separate section dedicated to Eastern Europe was established for the first time<sup>7</sup>.

The cooperation and discussions among historians of the region and around the history of the region had a crucial influence on the formation of

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7 Kłoczowski, J., „Europa Środkowowschodnia w przestrzeni europejskiej”, in *Europa Środkowowschodnia od X do XVIII wieku – jedność czy różnorodność?* (Cracow: 2005) 13.

a new concept – East Central Europe. This concept was politically motivated, the idea being to integrate the region in opposition to its powerful neighbours (Germany and the Soviet Union), but it was also important to develop the region's identity and distinctiveness, which became even more important after the Second World War, when the countries of this part of Europe came under the political influence of the Soviet Union.

The originator of the term East Central Europe was Oskar Halecki (1891–1973). In his 1950 book *The Limits and Divisions of European History* he introduces the term Central Europe, which he divides into West Central Europe, which includes the German states, and East Central Europe, which includes the region between the Soviet Union, Scandinavia, Germany and Italy. This proposal broke down the divisions between Western and Eastern Europe that dominated historiography at the time, and the third region located between them was already by definition a border region between two opposites: the Slavic East and the Germanic West, which Halecki saw as crucial in the history of the region. East Central Europe was linked to the West, absorbing various influences from there, on the other hand it was subject to influence from the East, while it remained a clearly separated region with its own identity.<sup>8</sup> Two years later, in his published work *Borderlands of Western Civilisation*, he developed his concept of East Central Europe as borderlands between West and East.<sup>9</sup> The idea of borders and borderlands has therefore been embedded in the concept of East Central Europe since the very beginning of the term.

While understanding the region of East Central Europe as a cultural borderland, researchers have distributed their accentuations in different ways. The Czech historian living in exile, Francis Dvornik (1893–1975), in a book that came out only one year before Halecki's publication, also reflected on the specifics of the region and the factors that led to its formation. He, too, considered a simple East – West division insufficient and in his reflections introduces the term 'Central Europe'. This is the region located between East and West, where external influences intersected. As history has developed, however, the region has lost its identity as an 'in-between' location. Its parts, gravitating towards the two cultural opposites (East – West), are, as it were, reconstructing the dividing line that separates Western Latin culture from the East, which is essentially Slavic but dominated by the Byzantine Empire. The borderland thus turns into a region of separation rather than one that fosters connection and exchange.<sup>10</sup>

8 Halecki, O., *The Limits and Divisions of European History* (London – New York: 1950).

9 Halecki, O., *The Borderlands of Western Civilization. A History of East Central Europe* (New York: 1952).

10 Dvornik, F., *The Making of Central and Eastern Europe* (London: 1949).

The Hungarian historian Jenő Szűcs (1928–1988) also attached great importance to the region of East Central Europe as a separate civilizational entity between medieval East and West, but according to him in the Middle Ages this region was a region of “connecting bridges” rather than “dividing lines”. He proposed focusing on the various ways of flow and exchange that took place between the two parts of Europe. The third region, East Central Europe, while receiving external influences (in social, political and cultural terms) nevertheless retained its own distinctiveness, different from both the West and the East.<sup>11</sup>

The Polish historian Jerzy Kłoczowski (1924–2017) in his works also devoted much space to East Central Europe.<sup>12</sup> In his book “Europa słowiańska” [Slavic Europe] he sees Slavicity as one of the region’s most important distinguishing features.<sup>13</sup> This concept grew out of the search for a regional identity based not on opposing external (political, cultural) forces represented by the East-West opposition but by focusing on the region’s specific characteristics. Jerzy Kłoczowski saw Slavdom as the dominant feature of this part of Europe and emphasised the similarities that united the countries comprising the region. At the same time, he was aware of the internal differentiation of this region, where he identified three zones. The first one included: Bohemia, Hungary, Poland and the Teutonic state; to the second one there belonged: Serbia, Bulgaria, Moldova and Wallachia; while among the third zone he included the Ruthenian lands of the former Kyiv Rus, and the important historical fact was the creation of two state organisms in these territories: The Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Grand Duchy of Moscow. The former, with the adoption of Christianity, came under the direct Western influence, although no small part of the population remained within the Orthodox Church. But these were not the only internal divisions (borders of sorts) that ran through Slavic Europe.

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11 Szűcs, J., *Vázlat Európa három történeti régiójáról. Bibó Emlékkönyv (In memoriam István Bibó)* (Samizdat: 1980); Official Hungarian edition first in *Történelmi Szemle* 24 (1981) 313–359, and a book edition Budapest 1983; English translation: “The Three Historical Regions of Europe”, *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungariae* 29 (1983) 131–184; French edition: *Les trois Europes* (Paris: 1985); Polish edition: *Trzy Europy*, transl. from the French edition J. Kłoczowski (Lublin: 1995).

12 We should add that he was also the initiator of the founding of the Institute of East Central Europe (2002–2018) and served as its long-standing director (2002–2013). Research at the Institute focused on the history up to the most recent times of the region. The Institute organised scientific conferences, carried out publishing activities and published the journal *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*.

13 Kłoczowski, J., *Europa słowiańska w XIV i XV wieku* (Warsaw: 1984).

‘When we are speaking about Slavic Europe it is absolutely necessary to keep in mind the peoples, although non-Slavic, that are so strongly connected with our region that we cannot omit them in any way.’ And here Kłoczowski mentions: Germans and Jews, Lithuanians and Prussians, he draws attention to the Romanian states and, above all, to Hungary, where, however, there also live many Slavs, and ‘[...] the Hungarians themselves have become so established in this part of Europe that many medieval authors [...] regard them either as Slavs or at least as their close relatives.’ The Polish historian emphasises the belief prevailing among the Slavs of the time in the community resulting from their descent from one single ancestor (to which I will refer later) and also points out that also Western Europe began to notice the Slavs in the 13th–14th centuries. And he concludes his argument: ‘[...] There is no doubt that the common history, in a certain sense, of the Slavic states, with Hungary included [...], clearly distinguished this group in any case from the Post-Karolinian regions of Western Europe or the Greek lands of Byzantium.’<sup>14</sup> In his subsequent synthesis of the history of East Central Europe in the Middle Ages Kłoczowski already emphasises another feature of the region: civilizational youthfulness. The adoption of Christianity by individual state organisms brought them into the cultural circles of two models of civilisation. This, however, did not interrupt the mutual interaction. Pointing to another internal feature integrating the region does not change the fact that the region is distinguished as a separate cultural entity.

The volatility of the borders of the entire region of East Central Europe, which is particularly evident in the long-term perspective from which we observe the changeability of political entities in the region, is therefore also linked to the multiplicity of overlapping internal divisions (ethnic, confessional, etc.). Border crossings over the heads of inhabitants without them leaving their own homes, voluntary migrations and forced displacements, living on and crossing cultural borders are experiences which are typical of this region.

### Slavedom – The Slavic World

The term ‘Slavic Europe’ as used by Jerzy Kłoczowski is controversial mainly because of its inadequate inclusiveness in relation to the ethnic diversity of the region, a point already made by its originator, who emphasised the significant presence of non-Slavic peoples in the area. In later times this presence would

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14 Kłoczowski, *Europa słowiańska* 8–9.

gain even more significant political representation, which, it would seem, would make the term even less useful. In spite of these reservations, it seems legitimate for us to see East Central Europe as a 'Slavic world', a 'Slavic Europe'. Indeed, Slavicity was perceived – by and in relation to the inhabitants of the region – as a unifying feature that strongly influenced imaginations and was the basis for self-identification not only in the medieval period.

The idea of a Slavic community was present primarily under two aspects: as a linguistic community and as a community of origin.<sup>15</sup> The former was realised already at the level of the etymology of the name 'Slavs'. According to linguists, the etymology of this word is not entirely clear, although it is certain that it is a name given to itself by the community and not by others. More relevant for our considerations is the popular etymology, which includes certain images originally known only to the educated and which over time have passed into the collective imagination.

In the second half of the 14th century the Czech chronicler Przybyk Pulkava of Rademin (d. 1380) derived the name 'Słowianie' (Slavs) from 'słowo' (word). Thus, the Slavs are a people who use words, i.e. who speak intelligibly. As a contrast, we have the ethnonym 'Niemcy' (Germans; from 'niemy' – mute), i.e. people who are mute because they do not use intelligible words and cannot be communicated with. Both etymologies adopted at the time clearly demonstrate group identification through language. It is this that is the distinguishing feature separating groups of 'ours' (the 'we' group) from 'strangers' (the 'they' group). The argument of linguistic commonality was practically used as a political argument: for example, the political manifesto of Přemysl Otokar II of 1278 pointed out to the commonality between Poles and Czechs expressed, among other things, by similarities of language. Almost 200 years later the same argument was used in the context of the election of Ladislaus Jagiellon to the Czech throne (1471). And between these events, the linguistic community was also strongly emphasised during the Hussite era.<sup>16</sup>

The second aspect of the Slavic community was the myth of origin, as Jerzy Kłoczowski pointed out, on the basis of national stories was built the legend of the ethnogenesis of the Slavs with the three brothers, Lech, Czech and Rus, the forefathers of the three nations, descended from Biblical Japheth, son of

15 Janeczek, A., „Świadomość wspólnoty słowiańskiej w pełnym i późnym średniowieczu”, in Makowski, K.A. – Saczyńska, M. (eds.), *Słowianie idea i rzeczywistość* (Poznań: 2013) 19–70; Saczyńska, M., „Czy istnieli Słowianie w późnym średniowieczu? Uwagi na podstawie lektury Roczników Jana Długosza”, in Makowski – Saczyńska (eds.), *Słowianie idea i rzeczywistość* 71–105.

16 Janeczek, *Świadomość wspólnoty słowiańskiej* 41, 43, 44–45.

Noah. In the Polish historiography of the period there is also a theme of the inclusion of the Hungarians into the ethnogenesis of the Slavs. Such a concept is found in the Chronicle of Dzierzwa (14th century), where it says that all Europeans descended from Japheth. One of his sons was Vandal, the ancestor of all Slavs, but also the ancestor of the Hungarians.<sup>17</sup> In the Chronicle of Greater Poland (*Kronika wielkopolska*) an unknown interpolator from the 14th century expresses the connection between Hungarians and Slavs even more precisely, proving that Hungarians are ... Slavs.<sup>18</sup>

The idea of a Slavic community also appeared in modern times, as the ideology of Pan-Slavism. Its forerunner is considered to have been Juraj Križanić (c. 1618–1683), a Croatian Catholic priest who initially promoted the idea of religious union in Russia which, however, brought accusations against him of trying to convert to Catholicism. Subsequently he was already in favour of the unification of the Slavs under the leadership of the Russian tsars, which he expressed in the work ‘Conversations on Government’ (or ‘Politics’) written in exile in Tomsk (1663–1666).<sup>19</sup> Pan-Slavism was born in the first half of the 19th century and was influenced by Romanticism with its fascination with the past and by the development of modern philology.<sup>20</sup> Two Slovaks are considered to be the pioneers of Pan-Slavism: Jan Kollára (1793–1852) and Pavel Josef Šafařík (1795–1861). Kollár, during his studies in Jena (1817–1819) and influenced by Romantic Germanic nationalism, began to formulate ideas of Slavic nationalism also strongly tinged with Romantic historicism. Pan-Slavism thus developed from the outset in opposition to German nationalism and Germanisation tendencies. The ideas of Pan-Slavism gained popularity in the Austrian (and

17 *Kronika Dzierzwy*, ed. Pawłowski, K. (Cracow: 2013) 163–165.

18 In his view, Pannonia is the cradle of the entire Slavic people, and he links this land to mythical Pan who descended from Japheth (he was the son of Janus son of Japheth). Pan had three sons, Lech, Rus and Czech, from whom many Slavic nations descend. On the river Wkra there lived the *Ungari qui et ipsi sunt Slawi*. This people was being attacked by the Goths, so they set off on a journey with their king Tila, called Atyla, and through Germany, Burgundy and Lombardy and reached Pannonia, where they settled permanently. Then all the Slavs came to them like a wave (*unda*), hence they were called *Vandali*, and some of them mixed with the Huns coming from Sicily and received the name *Hungari*. (*Chronica Polonae maioris*, ed. Kürbis, B. (Warsaw: 1970) 7). See: Grzesik, R., „Węgry a Słowiańszczyzna w najdawniejszym etapie dziejów w świetle słowiańskich i węgierskich źródeł narracyjnych epoki średniowiecza”, *Slavia Antiqua* 44 (2003) 53–65.

19 Križanić, J., *Politika ili razgovori o vladaštvu* (Zagreb: 1947); Križanić, J., *Politika* (Moscow: 1965).

20 There is a rich literature on the subject of Panslavism, here just two shall be mentioned: Kohn, H., *Pan-Slavism: Its History and Ideology* (Notre Dame: 1953); Walicki, A., *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland* (Oxford: 1982). Other works by these two authors are also worthy of being recommended.

later Austro-Hungarian) monarchy, which is not surprising in view of the fact that almost half of its population consisted of representatives of various Slavic nations. Among the proponents of Pan-Slavism there was František Palacký (1798–1876), a prominent historian, source editor, politician, organiser of cultural and scientific life, and considered the founder of modern Czech historiography. In his thought, the idea of Slavic unity was closely linked to the Habsburg monarchy (Austro-Slavism).

Among the Poles (from all three partition territories), ideas of Pan-Slavism overlapped with Slavic themes in the vibrantly developing Romantic and historiosophical literature. In both regions the tragedies of the loss of statehood and the complex attitude of Poles towards (Slavic) Russia, one of the partitioning parties, were intensively worked through. Historiosophical thought, however, also went beyond Slavic and pan-Slavic themes, creating the concept of Poland's unique role to play in relation to the world ('Christ of nations').

In Russia itself, Panslavism also found supporters in government circles, among thinkers, writers (F. Dostoevsky) and even anarchists (M. Bakunin); it also encountered ideas developing in practically parallel ways – Slavophilia (with this movement, Slavic unity as such played a lesser role, religious-mystical and anti-occidental themes were more important). The dominant position of Russian pan-Slavism (organisational – e.g. the Moscow Slavic Committee, numerical, cultural – Russian as the natural language common among all Slavs) and the political position of the Empire – the only internationally important Slavic state at the time – predestined Russia to play a decisive and leadership role. This, however, aroused controversy and distance among some representatives of the Slavic nations. The Polish question was also an ongoing point of contention. Agreement and cooperation were not facilitated by the growing sense of national independence (and even nationalism) of individual Slav nations, with the goal of regaining or building their own statehood. This led to a shift away from the idea of a mythical Slavic unity (along with attempts to embed it in the reality of the time) in favour of their own national interests, in opposition to Russia, but also in conflicts with other 'Slav brothers'.

The nation states formed after the First World War on the ruins of the three empires (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia) established a fruitful cooperation in the historical sciences, but by the formula of a historical region rather than with reference to an imagined 'tribal community'. An important factor – as I have already mentioned – was the desire to significantly distinguish themselves from one of the components of this 'Slavic tribe' – at that time already in the form of Soviet Russia and then the Soviet Union. After the Second World War, in view of the political domination of East Central Europe by the Soviet Union, these tendencies became even more pronounced.

The idea of a Slavic community remained in the realm of myth and ideology, but its presence and impact in history can hardly be denied, and the real presence of Slavic peoples in East Central Europe (and East Europe) remains an undeniable fact. This also predisposes us to see precisely the 'Slavic world' in these territories. We exclude Russia (in its various state forms over the century) from our considerations. The focus of interest, therefore, remains East Central Europe, which is an intermediate zone between 'East' and 'West' and an area of cultural encounters and divisions and a strong presence of the Slavic element. As a research tool for exploring the character and specificity of this region we have designated: language.

### Language

'Language separates us from others and unites us among ourselves; my countryman is not he who has risen from the same soil but rather he who speaks to me in my language. If social status, religion, political affiliation divide or separate us, language unites us again. The tribes that were doomed to extinction revived by nurturing their language first: having adopted this attitude, they later also adopted the rest, such as the Czechs.'<sup>21</sup> This testimony by Aleksander Brückner (1856–1939), for whom the study of language, its monuments and development was aimed at learning about the history of the people speaking it and their culture, is particularly telling. In the words of the eminent linguist and cultural historian, who at this point acts as a historical source and witness, a clear picture of a language community emerges. Moreover, language appears here as a factor operating 'across' social divisions (religious, political). The ethnic factor is also not insignificant. According to Brückner, it can be supported by language – the example of Bohemia, for which a language revival was combined with a cultural and national revival, and consequently also a state revival. However, if we look at the author of these words himself, we may point out that the ethnic factor can also be modified by language. Brückner himself is an example of the complexity, but also of the richness of the cultural borderland that is East Central Europe. He came from a German family of Austrian origin. His great-grandparents, Piotr Brückner and Elisabeth née Wagner, settled in Stryj in Galicia at the end of the 18th century. Their son was born there, and their great-grandson Alexander was also born there. In Lviv he attended a grammar school where the German language was taught, began

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21 Brückner, A., *Dzieje języka polskiego* (Lviv: 1906).

his studies there (he also studied in Vienna, Leipzig and Berlin), and after his habilitation (in Vienna) he began working (autumn 1878) as an adjunct professor at the University of Lviv. Two years later he was appointed to the chair of Slavic languages and literatures in Berlin, a position in which he remained until his retirement (1924). He also died in Berlin, shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, in May 1939.

The Brückners were representatives of a broader group of Austrian migrants (civil servants, teachers, soldiers, etc.) who tied their future and careers to Galicia<sup>22</sup>. This group gradually became Polonised (learning the language, contacts to the Polish environment) but retained a link with the German culture, which was sometimes a pragmatic choice (German schools and a career at German-speaking offices), but also a sentimental one (family tradition). However, the fate of individual family representatives turned out differently, mixed marriages increased the possibilities of cultural choices, and the introduction of Polish as an official language fostered acculturation and assimilation. The Mehoffers are a case in point. Joseph Edler von Mehoffer (1786–1844) settled in Galicia. His son Wilhelm was brought up and educated in the German language and culture: grammar school, university, and then he started a public service career in Galicia, also associated with German (Polish was not introduced as an official language there until the 1860s). He certainly also had strong contacts to the Polish language: school and university colleagues, Polish surroundings both in his native Lviv and later in Ropczyce, where he was head of the district office. After his marriage to Aldona Polikowska his connection to the Polish culture strengthened. Raised in two cultures and languages, his sons moved among both, but their identity choices were different, as is particularly evident in the case of two of them: Józef Mehoffer (1869–1946), an eminent painter identifying with Polishness who refused to sign the Volksliste during the Second World War, and his brother Viktor von Mehoffer (1865–?), a writer and actor identifying with the German culture, who tried to pursue an artistic career in Vienna.<sup>23</sup>

When analysing the border region, the cohabitation and coexistence of different ethnic groups, the intermingling of different cultural influences, reference to language in its social context (i.e. the social history of language) is very

22 Röska-Rydel, I., „Alexander Brückners familiäres Umfeld vor dem Hintergrund von Akkulturations- und Assimilationsprozessen deutscher und deutsch-österreichischer Beamtenfamilien in Galizien“, in Meyer, R. – Kąkolewski, I. – Hammel, R. – Grala, H. (eds.), *Aleksander Brückner und sein Erbe: Studien zur polnischen Kulturgeschichte und Slawistik vom 19. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart* [in print].

23 Röska-Rydel, I., *Zwischen Akkulturation und Assimilation. Karrieren und Lebenswelten deutsch-österreichischer Beamtenfamilien in Galizien (1772–1918)* (Munich: 2015) 270–297.

useful. It is language that allows borders between people to be crossed, but it is also through language that these borders can be built. Barriers can be constructed in spite of a common language, and sometimes they are crossed in spite of communication difficulties. The social context of language use(s) is even crucial.

Anna Adamska, writing about the social history of language and the usefulness of this field of research, emphasizes: 'There is no doubt that it [the social history of language research questionnaire; MSV] is very successfully suited to describe multilingualism in medieval East Central Europe. Treating our region at this time not as a periphery of medieval Latin Europe but as an region of coexistence and transition between *Latinitas* and the Byzantine-Slavic culture would provide great opportunities for analysing such complex religious-cultural-language configurations as those in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, in Red Ruthenia, in regions of Moldavia and Wallachia or in Croatia.'<sup>24</sup> We can extend these observations also to later periods. One has to agree that the culturally complex situation of East Central Europe even predestines this region for the study of social linguistic contexts. Adamska identifies them: multilingualism (interaction between languages, development, acquisition of the status of written and literary languages); language control and policy; the emotional sphere of language, which is linked to collective imagination, stereotypes, perceptions of the 'other' (hierarchies of languages; statuses of languages – e.g. language used for religious ceremonies = sacred language; positive and negative emotions associated with languages, etc.); psychological factors (openness to the other/foreigner, imitation, snobbery, ambition, etc.).<sup>25</sup>

Language (a particular language, dialect, but also a language register) defines a person and indicates his or her habitus, defines the communicative situation and the positions of interlocutors and their intentions. Multilingual environments and situations offer many opportunities to enrich linguistic communication. The choice of language in a particular situation is as much a pragmatic choice (agreement) as it is a strategic one (attitude towards the interlocutor). Under the year 1410 the Polish annalist Jan Długosz (1415–1480) records an event that took place on the occasion of Wenceslaus IV of Bohemia (1361–1419) announcing a verdict in a Polish-Teutonic dispute. Wenceslaus ordered the verdict to be read out in German, to which the Polish side protested. He therefore ordered it to be read in Czech. The situation escalated as this too was met with

24 Adamska, A., „Czy potrzeba nam jest społeczna historia języka?“, in Gawlas, S. (ed.), with cooperation of Michał T. Szczepańskiego, *Historia społeczna późnego średniowiecza. Nowe badania* (Warsaw: 2011) 198.

25 Adamska, „Czy potrzeba nam jest społeczna historia języka?“ 198–201.

protest and a clear declaration that the Poles did not understand the language. Wenceslaus replied that Polish and Czech were almost the same. This, however, sparked further protests and a lecture on the profound differences (the so-called 'false friends' of language, i.e. words that sound similar but have completely different meanings)<sup>26</sup>. The whole situation is not so much evidence of the actual differences between 15th-century Polish and Czech but of the use of the linguistic argument for political demonstrations. Polish delegations to the emperors always included people with a good understanding of German, and understanding the Czech version was not difficult either. It must be admitted that in diplomacy a good understanding of every word can be a crucial issue. It should also be added that, for non-Slavs, the differences between the Slavic languages were (and are) imperceptible or hardly perceptible.<sup>27</sup> However, it is difficult, in this situation, to excuse Wenceslaus and make his inadequate linguistic competence responsible for the whole situation. The whole situation clearly shows the hallmarks of a political demonstration, and language was a tool to show Luxembourg's unwillingness and partiality. In this particular situation it was Wenceslaus who committed a 'hostile use of the language' of Bohemia, not the Polish delegation who committed a 'hostile refusal to understand the language' of Bohemia.<sup>28</sup>

Language may or may not facilitate understanding and the crossing of barriers. But does not knowing the language condemn one to a complete lack of understanding? In multilingual environments there will always be someone to translate. This essay begins with literary quotations, let me conclude with a wonderful anecdote from Zbigniew Rokita's excellent reportage on Upper Silesia. 'My oldest neighbour from Wójtowa Wieś, a ninety-year-old – he prefers not to give his name, let's call him Fryderyk – tells me that before the war sometimes Silesian was spoken here, sometimes German. In the parish church, which had just been built on Herman's Hill, the priest celebrated mass sometimes in German and sometimes in Polish. The great-grandmothers of the neighbour in question, Konstancyzna and Johanna, were completely unable to communicate with each other, and this was before the First World War: Konstancyzna spoke only Silesian, Johanna only German. But they liked each

26 See.: Długosi, Iohanni, *Annales seu Cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae, Liber X et XI (1406–1412)* (Varsaviae: 1997) 51 (Liber XII – 1410).

27 Grabski, A.F., „Z zagadnień genezy polskiej wspólnoty narodowościowej”, *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego* 12 (1959) 59.

28 This passage, which has already been quoted many times in the literature, can testify to a good knowledge of Czech but is above all a record of Polish pride; see. Grabski, A.F., „Lingua Sclavonica' w poglądach polskich i zachodnioeuropejskich”, *Rozprawy Komisji Językowej Łódzkiego Towarzystwa Naukowego* 16 (1970) 257–258.

other very much. So when they were alone they smiled helplessly at each other in silence. And when someone came along who spoke both languages, they would sit him down and talk to each other for a long time through an interpreter. That's how it used to be here.<sup>29</sup>

Openness, the desire to understand and get to know, simple human sympathy, the search for a common tone of feeling for the world, a kind of interpersonal chemistry, without these qualities even knowledge of the language will not facilitate communication, and with these qualities it will be possible to cross language barriers as well.

On the cover of this volume, there is an engraving by Daniel Chodowiecki (1726–1801), one of the more famous copperplate engravers and illustrators of the 18th century. The artist's father, Gottfried, who was a grain trader in Gdansk, came from the Polish Protestant gentry of the Gniezno region. His mother Marie Henriette Ayzer, daughter of a Danzig goldsmith, was a Huguenot. The young Daniel was sent to Berlin to learn the trade as his uncle Antoine Ayzer's apprentice. Initially designing jewellery, over time he began to train as an artist. He became famous as an illustrator and engraver. His engravings decorated works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Schiller and many others. Shortly after arriving in Berlin, Daniel married Johanna Marie Barez, the daughter of a Huguenot embroiderer. This matrimony introduced him to the French migrant community in Berlin. In 1764, he became a member of the Royal Prussian Academy of Fine Arts and began to work intensively to raise its prestige. In time he became secretary of the Academy (1783), then rector (1786–1789) and pro-rector (1789–1797). Towards the end of his life, he led the Academy as its director (1797–1801). He is buried in the French cemetery in Berlin.

The engraving on the cover comes from a series created during a 1773 trip to Gdansk undertaken by Chodowiecki to visit his mother and his subsequent stay in the city. It depicts Chodowiecki himself, portraying Voivodess Felicyta Przebendowska, née Wielopolska, who, while finding the price of the portrait high (8 ducats), was said to be delighted to have acquired services of a Polish artist<sup>30</sup>. Chodowiecki did indeed describe himself as a Pole. In one of his letters written after the first partition of Poland (1772), i.e., not long before the Gdansk trip, he wrote: 'From my father I am a Pole, a descendant of a brave nation that

29 Rokita, Z., *Kajs. Opowieść o Górnym Śląsku* (Wołowiec: 2020) 69.

30 *Von Berlin nach Danzig. Eine Künstlerfahrt im Jahre 1773 von Daniel Chodowiecki*, 108 *Lichtdrucke nach den Originalen in der Königl. Akademie der Künste in Berlin mit erläuterndem Text und einer Einführung von Professor Dr. W. von Oettingen* (Berlin: 1895) Fig. 48 and description.

will soon cease to exist.' The artist's pessimism, although understandable in the 1770s, proved unjustified. He himself is another example of an individual from East Central Europe who lived on the borders between worlds, crossed those borders and drew from different cultural backgrounds.

Let Chodowiecki, together with Aleksander Brückner, the Mehoffers and the protagonists of Jerzy Pilch's prose and Zbigniew Rokita's reportages, act as a symbol of this volume.

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