

The Interpreters of Europe and the Cold War:

Interpretive patterns in French, German, and Polish historiography and literary studies

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This postdoctoral project examines the first two postwar decades, as many societies gradually found their European and national "places" and had to legitimize these culturally and historically against the backdrop of the Cold War rivalry of systems and ideologies. It investigates academic self-designs in postwar Europe, with the focus on literature and historiography as the central discourses in constructing national identities.

The project selects a historian and a literary scholar each from France, the Federal Republic, the GDR and Poland, whose work figured significantly in the discursive processes of the postwar period: Fernand Braudel and Robert Minder in France, Werner Conze and Ernst Robert Curtius in West Germany, Walter Markov and Werner Krauss in East Germany, and Oskar Halecki and Czesław Miłosz in Poland and, respectively, in US exile.

Strikingly, we find that the Cold War played a rather marginal part in these historians' and literary scholars' agendas. Even into the 1960s, they argued taking the idea of an undivided Europe for granted. What



kind of historical thinking "encountered" the Cold War in their work? How could they hold fast to understandings of Europe and the nation that, from today's perspective, seem far more suited to either the pre- and interwar periods or even the decades following 1989 than to the height of the Cold War? In stark contrast to what one might expect, these thinkers sought neither to undermine the systems' frontiers nor to construct a political alternative to the bipolar logic of the time. Rather, they pushed discussions over the modern world's challenges forward that were likewise being conducted in the US and USSR, yet were placed there much more strongly in the service of the East-West conflict, or even harnessed explicitly to research either camp's respective rivals. In comparison, the self-understanding of Europe following 1945 as expressed in the positions of these authors followed a somewhat different logic. Here, the Cold War was regarded less as a new world order than part of the *longue durée* of modernity since the 18th century and, together with the Second World War, as a symptom of the crisis of Europe – by liberals, conservatives in equal measure. The French and German scholars had begun standing up to this crisis as early as during the interwar period, while in Poland it was that country's restored sovereignty that became the catalyst for seeking its place in Europe. Both processes and the academic innovation they spawned remained relevant for their respective disciplines in postwar Europe and were developed further without necessarily associating or subjecting themselves to the competing standpoints of the superpowers.

Hence, Braudel's mark on the Annales school, Minder's historiography of mentality, Conze's social history, the examination of literary topos as



initiated by Curtius, the Enlightenment- and revolution research of Krauss and Markov and works on East Central European history and literature by Halecki and Miłosz in Poland and in exile are rightly regarded today neither as arguments by these writers regarding the Cold War nor as part of the opposition to the new world order. To be sure, the themes, convictions and enmities of the Cold War played a part in all their work. In no way, however, can it be said they adopted binary logics or models of thought.

Engaging the Cold War's interpretive patterns would have led to intellectual and methodical bottlenecks, and perhaps even to setbacks and blocks. Those like Braudel, Conze and Markov, who had discarded an event-based approach to history and politics and instead sought to highlight the importance of social structures, argued at the pan-European, if not global level, without seeking to subject the scope of his arguments to the East-West dichotomy. The same goes for Conze's social historiography, originally developed from nationalist research into German settlements in Eastern Europe. Pursuing the explicit goal of resolving Europe's crisis through "more Europe", Minder and Curtius worked on models of transfer and interdependence using comparative methods. A clear rejection of all Communist aspirations as expressed by Curtius did not necessarily imply an alignment of one's own positions with the "West", if that word meant the United States. In East Germany, Krauss launched a vein of Enlightenment research that was European and Marxist but not framed by the East-West dichotomy that he considered crude. Halecki and Miłosz put forward interpretations that stressed Poland's significance in Europe without being nationalist. The



model of the historical region, still relevant for research on East Central Europe, was a result of this work, which was clearly positioned against Communism and all other alien regimes and regarded Polish interests served better in an undivided historical region of Europe than in bias toward the American systemic rival. Halecki's dictum that Europe expanded to America and that the Atlantic has become an "inland sea of Christianity" epitomizes this European consciousness.

No sign of the Cold War then? Off course there was. None of these scholars escaped its institutional sway. Halecki and Miłosz, who had to flee Poland, felt it strongest of all. Krauss and Markov remained in the GDR yet were prevented from carrying out many research projects due to their lack of conformity to the system. Braudel wrote grant proposals to the Rockefeller Foundation to be sufficiently anticommunist for that institution yet not too pro-American-sounding for French ears. The list of examples continues. Conditions for scholarly work were therefore clearly marked by the new order. Intellectually to a lesser extent, but institutionally for sure, the Cold War palpably influenced the work of these scholars.

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