

## Summary

### In the Shade of the Hellenic Sun. Images of the Classical Antiquity in Modern Czech Culture

The present monograph explores various ways in which the ancient Greek and Roman culture has been appropriated and reinterpreted in the Czech lands over the past two centuries, from the terminal period of the so-called National Revival up to the present. Several notes at the beginning specify the methodological approaches and theoretical perspectives of the volume, stressing the historical and cultural dependence of every single act of commenting the past, which can never be completely deprived of imposing current ideologies and modes of perception on the historical issues. In terms of methodology, the theoretical background for the individual studies is Roland Barthes' concept of mythologies that accentuates the ability of language not only to describe, but also establish and even deform the extra-linguistic, i.e. historical, social, and cultural, phenomena. This general notion has been explored in the context of Czech National Revival by Vladimír Macura in his seminal book *Znamení zrodu* (*The Mark of Birth*), another influential source for the conceptualization of classical reception in the current monograph.

The first chapter called 'Noble Greece and Decadent Rome. Notes to the Stereotype' deals with the stereotypical image of Greece and Rome as ideological opposites, tracing it back as deep as to Montesquieu's *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leurs décadence* (1734). On the one hand, there is the reduced image of ideal Greek culture characterized by seeking perfection in all aspects of human life (politics, arts and literature, theatre, and thought). On the other hand, Rome is as a rule depicted as corrupted and declined, which is expressed synecdochically by the notorious gladiatorial combats. This contrasted image of the cultures is proved to be extremely persistent not only in European thinking about history, but also in the emerging Czech historiography and aesthetics, represented e.g. by opinions of aesthetician Josef Durdík and poet Jaroslav Vrchlický.

Here, the stereotype served as an ideological background for different political purposes, most notably the attempt at presenting the Czech nation as similar to the ancient Greeks as for the size, threats of the past, and hence also the prospective of cultural progress in the future.

The chapter 'The Image of Athenian Democracy in Czech Historical Handbooks of the 19th Century' explores the changing way ancient Athenian democracy was described and evaluated in nine Czech written historical handbooks for students and general public, originating from the 1830s to the 1890s, and one specialised journal article from the 1860s. In the older texts the age of Pericles is applauded for the cultural achievements but at the same time Athenian democracy as a political system is heavily criticized and Pericles is being made responsible for the rule of the 'mob' or 'rabble'. This image starts changing during the 1860s under the influence of Georg Grote's *History of Greece*, the liberalisation of Habsburg monarchy and the need to provide an unproblematic image of antiquity for the students of grammar schools. The Athenian democracy is no longer criticized, it is described neutrally or outspokenly praised.

Next chapter, 'The Image of Greek Tragedy in the Czech Culture in 19th and at the Beginning of 20th Century', brings forth several emblematic aspects of the idealized image of Greek culture dealt with in Ch. 1, specifically of its paramount achievement, the tragic theatre, as treated in the contemporary scholarly and popular writing. The greatest attention is devoted to the issue of stage and theatrical space, the shape of the orchestra, costuming (especially the use of *kothurnoi*), the capacity of Classical Greek theatres, etc.; all these aspects of theatre architecture and stage practice reveal, in writings of the Czech authors, a striking tendency towards a highly exaggerated image of Greek theatre, that was to support its divine and perfect nature, serving again as a philosophical and national precedent for the emerging Czech theatrical and political culture. In the same ideological vein is treated also the 'holy trinity' of Greek tragedians, Aeschylus symbolizing still somewhat clumsy, yet heroic and monumental inception of the tradition, Sophocles being considered its incontestable highlight, and Euripides representing its inevitable decline, if not an inexorable fall.

The tendency to draw a parallel between the achievements of the Czechs and Greeks is traced further in the chapter 'Classical Archaeology and the Czech National Revival 1872–1923', which deals with the beginnings of the discipline in the Czech lands, which were strongly influenced by political and ideological manipulations on the part of both politicians and scholars themselves, as is testified by the example of the founder of the first Czech department of classical archaeology, Otto Benndorf; classical archaeologist and founder of the Czech sport movement 'Sokol' (Falcon), Miroslav Tyrš; and another classical archaeologist of Romanian origin, Wilhelm Klein. The individual life stories of the three men graphically illustrate the complicated and ambivalent nature of presently taken-for-granted concepts such as 'nationality'/'nation', 'scientific objectivity', and 'classical antiquity'; it is apparent that rather than bearing independent meanings of their own, these concepts were in the given era often manipulated to play a role in the so-called games of power, to use Bourdieu's term, to fulfill various intentions of those involved.

The next chapter called 'Czech Falcons as Greek Athletes' introduces yet another case study elucidating the general issue of contextually conditioned reading of the past, i.e. a study of the way in which the already-mentioned classical archaeologist Miroslav Tyrš modelled the ideal of physically educated man/woman in the period of arousing Czech consciousness, and attempts to reach higher level of self-determination within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, on the example of Greek contest (*agon*). Again, the ideal Greek society was constructed and used intentionally as a proof of necessity of physical education for the establishment of politically independent nation, which was supported by impressive cultural performances held by members of Tyrš's athletic and gymnastic movement called 'Sokol' (Falcon). Special attention is devoted to one particular performance, the reenactment of the Battle of Marathon at a mass gymnastic festival in 1912, which is explored by means of theatrical analysis of set design, mise-en-scene, costumes, acting, etc.

The chapter 'Stereotypes in the Czech Translations of Plautus' Plays' draws attention to the issue of dramatic translation as a source of understanding cultural paradigms of the time the given transla-

tions were made in. The study of sixteen different Czech translations of eight Plautine plays (*Aulularia*, *Captivi*, *Menaechmi*, *Mercator*, *Miles Gloriosus*, *Mostellaria*, *Pseudolus*, *Rudens*) illustrates different attitudes towards translating the meanings of the original to the target language depending on what is considered appropriate in the given historical period in terms of language norms, taboos, theatricality, etc. Similarly, the last chapter devoted to the analysis of productions of ancient Greek and Roman drama from the 1940s up to now ('Shift in Staging Ancient Greek and Roman Drama in the Czech Republic') describes the changing ideologies behind staging classical plays in the Czech lands, namely the shift from substitutive function prominent during Communist period to a certain popularization and simplification in their interpretation after 1990. This shift seems to be caused by declining knowledge of classical culture among both the performers and their recipients, as well as by the postdramatic tendencies in contemporary theatre that encourage surprising and unorthodox interpretations of the dramatic canon regardless of their actual relation to the original meanings of the plays.

The volume is accompanied by appendix consisting of selections from the translations analyzed in Chapter 5, some of them unpublished, to give the reader more complex idea of their character. All in all, the given volume represents an interdisciplinary and multi-focused treatment of the issue of reinterpretation and rewriting history of the Classical Antiquity in 19th- and 20th-century Bohemia, providing interesting information concerning political, ideological, and cultural paradigms and strategies employed in the discourse of the period.