

ANTHROPOLOGY OF HISTORY

In the contemporary humanities, the close – often very close – relations between cultural anthropology and history are hardly surprising. This obvious link was certainly strengthened by the famous case of the French *Annales* school, its connections with the ideas of Claude Lévi-Strauss and later attempts at evolving various historiographical research communities towards a cultural perspective, which began at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s. However, contrary to the picture preserved in textbooks that are popular nowadays, and contrary to descriptions emphasising the importance of the last few decades for the development of a bond between cultural anthropology and history, we should not forget that relations between the two disciplines had been built much earlier. The origin of their cooperation had many, distant and often forgotten, precursors and local ‘implementers’, whose names we would search for in vain in the available synthetic works.

The humanities have no boundaries and from this perspective it is difficult to talk about leadership, based on nationality or territory, in implementing cooperation models between the two disciplines in question. Wherever historians and anthropologists have worked side by side, various anthropological and historical strategies of reflecting on the past have evolved. It should be interesting to follow how these diverse narratives – not just anthropological and historical, but also narratives of literary studies, religious studies, philosophy or sociology are heading in a similar direction – influenced by one another, what mark they left on specific, local narratives, and on the formal and informal communities, schools and research traditions built around them. This perspective can also be used successfully with regard to the contemporary relations between the previously mentioned disciplines.

Answers to the questions outlined above, both on the textual and meta-textual level, may increase sensitivity to the changeability of the characteristics of historical anthropology defined on a global scale, and may increase the awareness that a linear, monocentric reading of the processes of anthropologisation of historiography and historicisation of anthropology may deprive these processes of

their actual complexity and historical depth. A tendency, which exists in contemporary reflection, is to mark out a permanent measure of what historical anthropology is, may impose restrictions not only on what it could have been in the past, but also on what it is today and what it can be in the future. Anthropologisation of history and historicisation of anthropology can, however, be understood as a process of transformation, over time, of epistemological relations that are characteristic of these disciplines – the foundation of scientific thinking – a system comprised of subject, object and knowledge (language). On the one hand, the central role in this system is played by anthropologically understood concepts of culture, on the other – by philosophically and methodologically understood historicism, while each time the character and final result of these transformations is dependent on the theoretical and historical local incarnation of these two mutually transforming disciplines.

The contemporary perspective stemming from the anthropological understanding of culture is aimed at understanding and explaining the existing cultural order (first of all with regard to the principles and knowledge which organise this order) and the phenomena occurring within this order. Importantly, by showing to what extent people and their cultures have something in common and to what extent they are unique, cultural anthropology starts by examining people entangled in particularist systems of cultural conventions. An attempt to distance oneself from universalising thinking about the effect of multi-level interferences between cultural anthropology and history should lead to grappling the concrete, where variety and multiplicity will not be smoothly avoided thanks to images provided by standard self-descriptions, and the experience of various historical anthropologies will prompt back to taking account of the variety of convergence processes of the languages of both disciplines.

Considering the theoretical pluralism of the contemporary humanities and anticipating with hope the tasks that *Anthropology of History Yearbook* will face, we will quote the words of Frederic Barth, who – in truly ‘ecumenical spirit’ – wrote: “By all means, let us be prepared – indeed, let us expect – to discover *some* functional imperatives, *some* normative pressures, *some* deep structural patterns, *some* effects of the relations of production on life chances, and *some* shared cultural themes in ranges of local institutions. But let us demand that their presence be demonstrated through a record of extant variation, not asserted by fiat. And let us identify their effects in the sectors of cultural manifestation in which they appear, not use them as magical keys to understanding principles of construction valid for all of culture.”

It is the Editorial Staff’s intention that, on a plane outlined like this, *The Anthropology of History Yearbook* should create a permanent space for the development of cooperation between historiography and cultural anthropology

and their relevant methodologies in terms of multi-level research into the past and the functioning of its images in human cultures. The pages of our Yearbook will also be open to representatives of other humanistic disciplines, in particular literature studies, religious studies, philosophy and sociology, which conduct research into the past and its representations in a cultural key.

In world science the combinations of history and cultural anthropology were given various names, depending on the established local classification traditions, which is why we now talk about cultural history, anthropological history, micro-history, historical anthropology, historical ethnography, ethnohistory etc. The Anthropology of History Yearbook would like to embrace all these traditions, while searching for its own, original research identity. This should be achieved by means of the double subject matter of the publication, oriented towards promoting the interpretational practice of researchers of the past on the one hand, and meta reflection and detailed studies on the place and role of history and the broadly understood knowledge of the past in contemporary culture on the other hand.

Starting this new publication, we also want to fill the gap in the knowledge about what happened in the past and is happening today in our part of the world with regard to our field of interest. We strongly believe that interpretational communities in this area did not and do not play the role of passive assistants in creating and applying new ideas in the globally understood research practice. Even in the difficult times of the cold war division, the transborder exchange of thoughts took place and interpretational proposals evolved both here, locally, and in distant research communities, were actively processed. By definition, our periodical is supposed to provide a space for future creative meetings of groups and individuals that take different paths leading in a similar direction. We count on the cooperation of authors from many different communities, because without such cooperation it will be impossible to achieve our goal.

The term 'anthropology of history' used in the Yearbook title (probably introduced to Polish literature by Professor Ludwik Stomma) encapsulates, in our opinion, an equal openness towards historians, methodologists of history, historians of historiography, literary studies specialists and cultural anthropologists. In the Polish language, it plays on the ambiguity of the word 'history', sometimes understood as *res gestae* and sometimes as *historia rerum gestarum*. For cultural anthropologists and methodologists of history, the latter part of this semantic field is more important; for historians it is the former one. Thus, various options and strategies of interpreting history are included – both factual interpretations and interpretations on the metalanguage level. The term 'anthropology of history,' doing away with the nomenclature accepted so far, also breathes fresh air into 'historical anthropology,' already traditional in many research communi-

ties. It is a signal that we are open to change, rather than want to merely preserve the already grasped conceptual and object fields.

It is often the case that the first volume of a new periodical is designed to be a programmatic one. We decided that in the case of the community gathered around Anthropology of History Yearbook it would be very rash to do so – after all, meaningful programmes are written only after the scattered forces have been gathered together, after a thorough review of their achievements and theoretical background has been conducted, after the ranks have been categorised and rearranged. This volume, to our mind, is merely initiating the process, but it is also material proof of the already agreed preliminaries of peace. In international relations, preliminaries of peace is an agreement between states in which they pledge to cooperate and keep the peace on their borders, although detailed terms remain to be regulated at a later date. The volume in the Reader's hands confirms that a preliminary agreement has been reached, not only between historians and anthropologists but also representatives of other disciplines who will be willing to make the effort to wander the vast problem fields mentioned above.

The Editorial Staff