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SLAVISTS IN ODESSA: IDEA, PROJECT, CONFERENCE

Odessa, a "mythical" city, known across continents, a city which lives by the myth of the sea, which has also spread to mass culture – this city has no history of its writers or works eulogising this special place. People of different cultures, including Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, Jewish, Greek, Bulgarian, Romanian were attached to Odessa. In short, whoever set foot in this port, one of the biggest in the world, left written and other artistic testimonies of the meeting with the former Greek colony, the city of Catherine the Great and count Richelieu, a thriving industrial and trade centre attracting Poles, Jews, Russians and people from the West. Odessa is doubtlessly a mythical city of many cultures. Here artists such as Aivazovsky, Mickiewicz, Pushkin, Lesya Ukrainka, Jabotinsky, Kraszewski, Paustovsky left their trace.

Yet, despite the outstanding achievements of specialists in Odessa studies – historians, literary scholars, linguists – the myth of Odessa in both Slavonic cultures and around the world remains the topic far from exhaustion.

The I International Scientific Conference "The Image of Odessa in Slavonic Literatures", which took place on 12-13 September 2013, aimed at fulfilling this research potential. The organisers on the part of Ukraine included: the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, Odessa I.I.Mechnikov National University, the Department of the Ukrainian Literature. On the part of Poland, the Conference was organised by: the University of Białystok and the Department of Philological Studies "East-West" operating at the Faculty of Philology. I presented the idea of this conference in 2012, during a guest lecture in Odessa. It was enthusiastically picked up by Prof. Natalya Malyutina, specialist in Ukraine and Russian literature, and comparative studies, and supported by Prof. Oksana Shupta-V'yazovska, the Director of the Department of Ukrainian Studies. Also the Dean of the Faculty of Philology, Evgen Czernoivanenko, supported the idea of the Conference. Tetyana Liptuga, the Director of Odessa State Literature Museum located in the city centre, in the former mansion of Prince Gagarin, proposed this beautiful building as the conference venue. The Organising Committee was established and included also: Prof. Wiktor Griniewicz, Dr. Anna Janicka, Dr. Iryna Nechytalyuk, Jacek Juszkiewicz, Joanna Samp. Since this was designed as international event, first

of this type, also a Scientific Committee was appointed. Its full composition is available in the Annexe, where we included the Conference Programme.

The conference sessions began on 12 September in the Golden Hall of the Literature Museum with a welcoming speech of Prof. Natalya Malyutina and Prof. Jarosław Ławski, as well as introductory speeches of the Dean, Prof. Evgen Czernoivanenko and the Museum Director, Tatyana Liptuga. The inaugural speeches were given by Prof. Bogdan Burdziej (The Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland), *Odessa in the works of Polish writers 1794–1914* and Prof. Mariya Litovskaya (Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia): *Two Odessas of Valentin Kataev*. The sessions lasted two days, in sections, and took place in the beautiful halls of the Literature Museum. Sixty participants from 5 countries: Ukraine, Poland, Russia, Belarus and Bulgaria, took part in the conference. The Ukrainian hosts emphasised that for the first time in Odessa, where Russian-speaking population dominates, the sessions were conducted in several Slavonic languages treated equally. And again the old truth was confirmed, that Slavs do not need interpreters in such situations. We organised the main issues analysed by scholars in the following way:

- Literary images of Odessa in Ukrainian, Polish and Russian literature and in other Slavonic literatures.
- Travellers from the East and West of Europe in Odessa – their image of the city and its inhabitants.
- Odessa and the Black Sea, the port of Odessa – literary visions.
- The mythology of Odessa in literature and art (for example, the Potemkin Stairs or Odessa Opera).
- Multinational, international character of the city – the image of Odessa's inhabitants in the past and today.
- Painting, sculpture, music, theatre, opera in Odessa – their literary representations; Odessa on screen and canvas.
- Odessa and form: the genre productions of the city's image.
- The myth of Odessa in Slavonic cultures (confronted with the images of this city in Western literatures).
- Odessa's idiolect – the language of the city in the accounts of travellers, writers, guests.
- Writers and artists from Odessa.
- Between sensualism and metaphysics – philosophical contexts of the city's image.
- Aesthetics of Odessa's representations in Slavonic literatures: from realism to grotesque.
- Odessa as cultural palimpsest: from its Greek origin to its Ukrainian contemporary times.
- Great Slavs in Odessa: Mickiewicz, Pushkin, Lesya Ukrainka, Paustovsky, Vazov, Aivazovsky.

The volume we present to the readers is published with a certain delay for the reasons beyond the conference organisers' control. The September of 2013 was the last peaceful month in Ukraine. The following month brought the famous historical events which pushed aside the publication of this book: the events on Maidan, annexation of Crimea, war in Donbas, unrest in Europe and around the world. With the idea behind the Conference and this book, we wish to show a different model of intercultural relations than the one dominating in the world in 2013–2016. The model of cooperation in the space which is also ours.

The wonderful atmosphere of the Conference sessions and social life is worth emphasising in this context. Poles, Ukrainians, Russians – we all discussed the literary and cultural myth, as if we had always been members of the multinational community of this city. The elements of this meeting, such as visits to the Opera, sightseeing of the city, its museums, walks down the Deribasowska Street and, last but not least, the great reception closing the conference in the halls of the Literature Museum, will forever be engraved on the beautifully nostalgic memory.

The September of 2013 in Odessa was unusually rainy. It was raining for several days during the Conference. Nevertheless, we all learned from this meeting that literature and its values are the latent language, a code, which brings people together even in the most unfavourable historical circumstances. Today, the Odessa meeting remains a sunny memory. Which – we hope – will be continued. As our experience demonstrates, studying Odessa is a meeting with each of many cultures creating this mythical space-time continuum called Odessa.

Organising of the Conference would not be possible without a personal support from people I would particularly like to thank: Natalya Malyutina, the *spiritus movens* of the meeting, Prof. Oksana Shupta-V'yazovska – an outstanding Ukrainian studies scholar; Prof. Evgen Czernoivanenko – Russian philologist, the Dean of the Faculty of Philology; Prof. Bogusław Nowowiejski – the Dean of the Faculty of Philology of the University of Białystok, who supported this idea; Dr. Anna Janicka – my Wife – who organised this session with me on the part of Poland; Sonia Demianova – a tireless organiser from Odessa; Prof. Yaroslav Polishchuk and Prof. Tetyana Meyzerska, who represented the Ukrainian milieu from Kiev. My sincere thanks to them and all Conference participants.

I hope that this book demonstrates the substantial scholarship of us all – Poles, Ukrainians, Russians – contributing to our knowledge about the treasure of the Black Sea – Odessa. The city that already has its own myth.

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