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KONSTANTY MICHALSKI, ALEKSANDER BIRKENMAJER, AND THE ORIGINS OF THE *ARISTOTELES LATINUS* PROJECT

Abstract. The article attempts to present to the English reader the silhouettes of two outstanding Polish scholars active during the 20th c.: the philosopher and historian of philosophy Konstanty Michalski, and the historian of science, philosophy and of the book, Aleksander Birkenmajer. Among other achievements, both these scholars were instrumental in the coming into being and development of one of the most important international projects concerning the history of medieval philosophy—the *Aristoteles Latinus* Project.

Keywords: philosophy, history of philosophy, history of learning, history of science, history of the book, *Aristoteles Latinus*.

1. *Aristoteles Latinus*

Aristoteles Latinus belongs to the category of long-established academic projects that are widely known and highly esteemed among scholars. It is justly considered one of the foundations of our understanding of the Latin intellectual culture of the Middle Ages. It is also common knowledge that the project is based at the De Wulf-Mansion Centre of the Catholic University of Leuven, and that it was established by the International Union of Academies. What is less known, is that the origins of the project go back to two outstanding Polish scholars in the 1920s, namely Konstanty Michalski and Aleksander Birkenmajer. Today, when *Aristoteles Latinus* is nearing its centenary, it is perhaps worth recalling the silhouettes of these two Cracovian professors and how the idea of the project originated and found its way to international scholarship.[1]

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[1] See P. B. Rossi & L. Bianchi, *The Aristoteles Latinus Project* ... , where further reading is provided.

2. Konstanty Michalski

Konstanty Michalski was born on 12 April 1879 in Mała Dąbrówka.[1] Today, this locality is a district of the city of Katowice, the largest municipality in the Silesian conurbation. Towards the end of the 19th c., Mała Dąbrówka was a small village situated in the eastern border regions of imperial Germany, inhabited chiefly by an ethnically Polish population subdued by intensive Germanisation. Michalski's family was of modest means and cherished no educational tradition. His father worked in nearby steelworks, while his mother was a housewife. Moreover, at the age of approximately three, he was orphaned and had to move to his paternal uncle's, who lived nearby in Siemianowice. His education started there in a German eight-class primary school, where, as he later recalled, speaking Polish was considered misconduct, and was punished. Little more is known about Michalski's early school years.

In 1893, he moved to Cracow in the Austrian partition of Poland, and enrolled in the second class of the Minor Seminary conducted by the Congregation of the Mission, a Catholic order dedicated to missionary activities among the common people. During the last decades of the 19th c., the situation in Austrian Poland became far less oppressive than in Prussia. In Galicia—today the south-eastern part of Poland and western part of Ukraine—Poles enjoyed local self-government, while use of the Polish language was restricted neither in schools, nor in administration. Furthermore, the two universities of the province, located in Cracow and in Lviv, were Polish and constituted an important part of the Polish national life.

The Minor Seminary was a middle school for boys, which educated future clergy of the Congregation of the Mission. Young Michalski found there warmth, and family-like conditions. He well remembered the Minor Seminary years. Later on, his education continued at the Seminarium Internum (1896–1898), a sort of novitiate already within the Congregation. Although the choice to become an ecclesiastic was already made, Michalski knew that he also wanted to continue learning. So, he studied theology at the Diocesan Seminary in Cracow. During the second year, he simultaneously enrolled at the Jagiellonian University. By then, he was already an ordained priest and member of the Congregation, and had duties as such teaching children and novices, and extending pastoral care to adults. The number of his responsibilities was rapidly growing; he was an active teacher, priest, editor, and writer. At the University, he attended seminars devoted to Polish philology, Slavic studies, and philosophy. In 1909, Michalski was sent abroad and became a student of the University of Louvain. He joined the Higher Institute of Philosophy, the renowned Neo-Thomist centre founded by Désiré Mercier. It was there in Louvain, that Michalski finally found his true calling, and started his life-long career as a man of learning. In 1911, after receiving a doctorate, he returned to Poland, but his

[1] There are numerous accounts of Michalski's life, of which the fullest is: A. Usowicz & K. Kłósak, *Ksiądz Konstanty Michalski (1979–1947)*. A full bibliography of Michalski's works is to be found in: A. Usowicz, K. Kłósak & F. Bima, *Bibliographie*. See also M. Markowski, *Biographie*, M. Kurdziałek, *Udział ks. Konstantego Michalskiego i Aleksandra Birkenmajera ...* & S. L. Piech, *Księdza Konstantego Michalskiego życie i dzieło.*

associations with Louvain and the Higher Institute remained strong and close until the end of his life.

In Cracow, his newly acquired competences were immediately put to use. He was appointed lecturer of philosophy at the Theological Institute of the Congregation of the Mission. His performance in that capacity quickly gained recognition. In January 1914, when the Chair of Theology of the Jagiellonian University was unexpectedly vacated after the premature death of Professor Franciszek Gabryl, Michalski assumed part of the responsibilities of the late scholar; primarily teaching Christian philosophy. Thus started his career at the University of Cracow. His academic initiation coincided with the outbreak of World War I. Towards the end of the war, in 1918, Michalski obtained the higher doctorate (habilitation) required by the University statutes and, as a result, was nominated to the post of professor extraordinarius. This was also the time of rebirth of independent Poland, so his promotion was confirmed by the new Polish Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education, in 1919. In 1921, he received his final academic promotion to the post of professor ordinarius.

During the first years of his university career, Michalski continued to combine teaching responsibilities at the University with his former obligations at the Theological Institute of the Congregation. However, in 1922, he resigned his post at the Institute, because keeping up duties both at the University and at the Institute proved too burdensome. This did not mean that Michalski ceased to be active as a priest and member of the Congregation. Indeed, until the end of his life, he constantly engaged in all kinds of religious, educational, and organisational activities, giving talks, serving on committees, and acting as expert to various institutions both ecclesiastical and secular.

As a university teacher Michalski gave lectures and classes in the fields of philosophy, theology, and psychology. He was remembered as a person who put a lot of effort into his teaching, but also required hard work from his students. This method worked well with the brighter and more diligent students, but the weaker or less prone to hard exertion were quickly discouraged. But Michalski did not limit his activities at the University to teaching. He was also an accomplished administrator serving four terms as Dean of the Theological Faculty, and in 1931 was elected to the eminent post of the Rector of the Jagiellonian University.

As a scholar Michalski promptly acquired recognition. Already in 1923, he was appointed member of the Polish state delegation responsible for the revindication of books and art treasures forcibly removed to Russia during the partition period.[1] His obligations therein encompassed selecting manuscripts belonging to the fields of theology, canon law, and Romance studies. In this capacity he visited Saint Petersburg twice. Nevertheless, Michalski primarily remained a university teacher and researcher. Whenever his teaching or administrative

[1] The 1921 Riga Treaty, ending the war between Poland and Soviet Russia, foresaw the establishment of a joint Polish-Soviet Commission to decide upon the surrendering by the Russians of collections of books and objects of art acquired from Polish territories after 1772.

duties permitted, he would travel to study manuscripts in the libraries of the Vatican, Paris, Berlin, Oxford or Cambridge. As a member of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences [Polska Akademia Umiejętności, henceforth PAASc], he visited learned gatherings and keenly participated in their activities. Apart from Polish, he published the results of his inquiries in international journals in German and French. International acknowledgement followed. In 1928, at the Brussels siting of the International Union of Academies [Union Académique Internationale, henceforth IUA], Michalski proposed the project *Corpus Philosophorum Medii Aevi*, which finally led to the establishing of the *Aristoteles Latinus* project. During the 1930s, when the project begun to gain momentum, he was among its directors. By then, Michalski already was an international authority, and his publications and opinions were highly valued by scholars such as Étienne Gilson, Martin Grabmann, Maurice De Wulf, or F. M. Powicke.

During the second half of the nineteen-thirties Michalski suffered the first check to the development of his scholarly pursuits. His eyesight, till then serving him unwaveringly during the long hours he spent each day reading ordinary printed matter and demanding medieval manuscripts, started to fail. For a researcher who relied predominantly on primary sources, this was a severe impediment. Although, his last work strictly related to medieval studies appeared in 1937, he never gave up hope that one day he would return to reading and analysing manuscripts. In the meantime, he refused to slow down, but turned to less eyesight-exacting forms of research activities.

The devastating blow came in the autumn of 1939. With the outbreak of World War II and the following German occupation, the official functioning of Jagiellonian University was terminated. Then came the infamous *Sonderaktion Krakau*. On 6 November 1939, the Cracovian professors were summoned to a meeting at the Collegium Novum of the University, during which the German authorities were to announce their attitude towards learning and higher education in occupied Poland. As soon as the professors showed up, they were arrested and transported to various places of internment, finally to be incarcerated at Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp. Michalski along with 183 other Polish intellectuals found himself subjected to brutal deprivations and mistreatment. It was his imprisonment, and that of other close collaborators with Western scholars that caused international outrage and protests, in particular from Hitler's Italian allies and from the Vatican, that led to their release. Between February and late 1940, those who survived were allowed to return home, Konstanty Michalski in their midst.[1]

After returning to Cracow, Michalski was in poor health. Moreover, the Germans made no secret of their hostile attitude towards the Polish intelligentsia. He was well aware that could be arrested at any time, under any pretext. To Michalski's aid came Bishop Jan Lorek of the Sandomierz Diocese, who offered him the post of chaplain in Sichów, a remote village over a hundred kilometres north-west of Cracow. Thus, the famous scholar and ecclesiastic, disappeared from the immediate view of the occupiers, becoming for the next

[1] See *"Sonderaktion Krakau". Die Verhaftung der Krakauer Wissenschaftler am 6. November 1939*.

five years a humble country priest tending to the spiritual needs of simple country folk. To his credit it must be stressed that he treated his new duties very seriously, in return winning the sympathy and affection of his new parishioners. In 1945, when Cracow—fortunately without severe destruction—was captured by the Soviet Army, Michalski returned to the Jagiellonian University. He needed no encouragement to fully engage in the revival of academic life. In spite of quickly deteriorating health, he taught at the University, wrote scholarly works, and participated in regular pastoral duties. Michalski died on 6 August 1947.

Michalski's scholarly interests evolved over the years.[1] Initially, he was chiefly concerned with experimental psychology. At Louvain, he was trained in contemporary philosophy with a particular interest in logic, theory of cognition, psychology, and natural sciences. Getting acquainted with the major works of such authors as Ernst Mach and Pierre Duhem, Michalski observed that the most important minds of the Renaissance were heavily indebted to earlier thinkers, in particular those of the 14th c. This in turn led to the vital question: could Copernicus have already been confronted with nominalism during the early stages of his education in Cracow? The Thomistic foundations of philosophy acquired at the Higher Institute of Philosophy also prepared Michalski for medieval studies. Scrutiny of fifteenth-century manuscripts of the Jagiellonian Library gave a positive answer to this crucial question; representatives of the Scotist, Thomist, and Buridanist schools were active there. Hence, he started to follow the individual philosophical concepts of Cracovian professors. Searching for their origins, he found them in fourteenth-century Paris and Oxford with such figures as Buridanus, Marsilius of Inghen, and Nicholas Oresme.[2] Reaching deeper, Michalski modified Duhem's conclusion of the importance of fourteenth-century scepticism and nominalism in the development of European philosophy and science, by pointing out that the trend originated from numerous earlier ideas and concepts, culminating in the 14th c.[3] This was a major achievement that won him recognition among international scholars.[4]

In the later nineteen-thirties, with the severe weakening of his eyesight, Michalski had to turn to topics which were more speculative and less reliant on physical scrutiny of primary sources, and so he returned to Dante. Michalski published his first study devoted to the author of the *Divine Comedy* as early as 1921. He would return to the great Italian poet several times during the following years, but towards the end of his life, he embarked on a wider study discussing topics such as the influence of scepticism and mysticism on Dante, and Dante's ideas concerning cognition, as well as relations between literary fiction and scholarly writings. Michalski was working on a wider study devoted to these themes, but he never finished this book.

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[1] For a more detailed discussion of the philosophical ideas of K. Michalski, see *Poglądy filozoficzne Konstantego Michalskiego*.

[2] See K. Michalski, [reply to survey], p. 5.

[3] See M. Kurdziałek, *Udział ks. Konstantego Michalskiego i Aleksandra Birkenmajera ...* , pp. 101–103.

[4] Many years later, K. Flasch paid tribute to K. Michalski in his introduction to a reprint of the most important articles concerning fourteenth-century philosophy by the latter: K. Flasch, *Einleitung*.

Harsh war-time experiences turned Michalski's attention to Albert Chmielowski (1845–1916), a Franciscan tertiary who founded the religious organisation of Albertine Brothers, dedicated to caring for the poor and destitute.[1] In 1946, he published the results of his studies in a book that concentrated on the spiritual transformations of the Franciscan tertiary, who prior to his saintly accomplishments for people in need, was a revolutionary during the anti-Russian January Uprising of 1863–1865, then studied engineering, and also attained renown as a successful painter.[2]

Apart from studying the life and works of the saintly Albert, Michalski devoted a lot of time to investigations concerning the philosophy of history. He deliberated on meaning in history, treating the issue on the widest basis. He wanted to get to the bottom of the problem of the destiny of human existence in the face of evil. As a result, he came up with his own philosophical answer, drawing upon Thomism. During the last two years of his life, Michalski, although pressed by other duties, found time to work on a book he begun during the war that treated this theme. It was entitled *Between Heroism and Bestiality*.[3] This book appeared only after his death.[4]

3. Aleksander Birkenmajer

The family roots of Aleksander Birkenmajer were entirely different from those of Konstanty Michalski. Birkenmajer was born to a Polonised family of German origins. His ancestors can be traced to fourteenth-century southern Germany. His great-great-grandfather Anton lived in the village of Au just south of Freiburg im Breisgau. In the same village was born his great-grandfather, also Anton (1778–1830). Later on, the younger Anton and his brother Joseph participated as soldiers of Napoleon's *Grande Armée* in the Russian campaign of 1812, during which both received wounds. Joseph ended up as a Russian captive, and after regaining freedom remained in the former Polish territories incorporated into Russia. Anton recuperated in Zamość in the Kingdom of Poland under the Tsarist rule, and then moved south to the Austrian partition. Finding employment in the small town of Tuchów, he married Anna Wyszowska, with whom he had eight children; the seventh of which was Józef Herman (1825–1856) the future father of Ludwik Antoni, and grandfather of Aleksander. In 1847, during the reactionary backlash in Lviv after the revolutionary upheaval of 1846, Józef Herman was relegated from the university, only weeks from his graduation. As a result, a hoped-for career in governmental administration became impossible. Józef Herman spent the rest of his short life toiling as a clerk at various local institutions. He died at the age of 31, leaving a widow with three small children. Thus, the early life and education of his third child Ludwik Antoni (1855–1929) was not without deprivation. Nevertheless, Lud-

[1] A. Chmielowski was beatified in 1949, and canonized in 1989.

[2] See K. Michalski, *Brat Albert*.

[3] See K. Bochenek, *Rev. Konstanty Michalski's reflections …* .

[4] See K. Michalski, *Między heroizmem a bestialstwem*. The book was prepared for print by A. Usowicz.

wik Antoni was gifted and hard working. Already, during secondary schooling, he displayed exceptional talents for the sciences. This decided the profile of his university training at Lviv. Having successfully completed his studies, Ludwik Antoni became a teacher of maths and physics in an agricultural secondary school in Czernichów near Cracow. As such, he acquired a doctorate (1879) and habilitation (1881) at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, where he started to teach the history of mathematical sciences. With time, he acquired full professorship at the Jagiellonian University.[1] His fields of specialisation were mathematics, physics, geophysics, astronomy, and the history of science; his most important published works concerned Nicholas Copernicus.[2]

In 1882, Ludwik Antoni married Zofia Karlińska (1861–1943), daughter of Franciszek Michał Karliński (1830–1906), professor of the Jagiellonian University and director of the Cracow Astronomical Observatory. Karliński was not only an astronomer, but also a historian of astronomy, noted for the first outline of Polish astronomy in *Rys dziejów obserwatorium astronomicznego Uniwersytetu Krakowskiego* (1864). Zofia too was no ordinary housewife. She was an intellectual in her own right, with independent scholarly ambitions and achievements in the field of eighteenth-century book history and bibliography. Together, Ludwik and Zofia created a loving and caring family, which placed special emphasis on education and intellectual development of their eleven children. Their accomplishments were extraordinary, and their legacy imposing. Among their descendants one finds numerous academics, writers, poets, translators, diplomats, and higher-ranking military officers.

Aleksander Ludwik Birkenmajer was born in Czernichów, on 8 July 1890.[3] After completing his primary education in a local school, in 1900, he entered the renowned gymnasium in Chyrów. The school was an elitist secondary educational facility run by Jesuits. Among its graduates one finds a considerable number of important names in Polish history, like the crucial figure in modernising the interwar Polish economy Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, writer Franciszek Ksawery Pruszyński, poet Kazimierz Wierzyński, philologist Stanisław Łoś, and many other important personalities. The curriculum of the Chyrów school placed special emphasis on classicist subjects and the humanities. It was there that Aleksander Birkenmajer mastered Latin and Greek, and acquired his love and appreciation for letters. His mastery of modern languages was also exceptional. In later life, in speech and writing he commanded: German, French, English, and Swedish, and read in all European languages.[4] Nevertheless, in

[1] All the details quoted above are to be found in: L. A. Birkenmajer, *Kronika rodzinna*.

[2] His two most important works on Copernicus are: L. A. Birkenmajer, *Mikołaj Kopernik* & L. A. Birkenmajer, *Stromata Copernicana ...* . After a hundred years, both are still judged to be of scientific value. The former has lately been translated into English by A. Goddu: L. A. Birkenmajer, *Nicolaus Copernicus*.

[3] The biographical outline below is based on: B. Olszewska, J. Dobrzycki & M. Kurdziałek, *Aleksander Birkenmajer 1890–1967*, J. Zathey, *Działalność Aleksandra Birkenmajera ...* , A. M. Birkenmajer, *Biographie d'Aleksander Birkenmajer*, R. Nowicki, *Działalność Aleksandra Birkenmajera ...* , pp. 96–108 & A. Krawiec, *Aleksander Ludwik Birkenmajer (1890–1967)*. An account of the personal character of A. Birkenmajer can be found in: J. Kapuścik, *Profesor. Ze wspomnień ucznia*.

[4] See J. Zathey, *Działalność Aleksandra Birkenmajera ...* , p. 198.

choosing his higher studies he followed in the footsteps of his father, and opted for mathematics and physics, spending the years 1908–1913 at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. Thus, Birkenmajer received exceptional training: a solid bedrock in classical and modern languages, and in the humanities combined with a deep understanding of mathematics and physics. This training predestined him to continue on the highest level his father's and grandfather's pursuits in the history of the exact sciences.

In 1911, not yet a graduate, Birkenmajer accompanied his father and several other Polish scholars on a research trip to Swedish archives in search of Copernican traces.[1] As a student, he also regularly performed various jobs for the Astronomical Observatory of the University and gave private lessons. In this way, he earned money to contribute to his own living.

Following his graduation in 1913, Birkenmajer concentrated on his doctorate, which he finalised in March 1914. The dissertation focused on Henry Bate of Mechelen (1246–after 1310) and the astronomical treatise *Tractatus super defectibus tabularum Alphonsi* attributed to him. Birkenmajer questioned this attribution, dating the work to the following century.[2]

During the next years, there was little opportunity to advance professionally because of the war and the turbulent rebirth of Poland afterwards. Birkenmajer spent these years working as a teacher in private schools. He was hoping for a junior researcher post in history of the exact sciences at the University. Unfortunately, the financial situation was difficult, and the only position that was available was that of a librarian at the Jagiellonian Library. Wishing not to lose contact with the University, in 1919, Birkenmajer accepted the offer, considering it a temporary solution, and became a librarian. This seemingly interim job became a turning point in his life. Soon, studying old books and manuscripts, library work, and organising book repositories came to be for him a life-long passion, just as important as studying the history of the exact sciences. His superiors promptly recognised his talents, and in 1924, he was promoted to the position of Head of the Manuscript Department of the Jagiellonian Library. By then, Birkenmajer was already an established collaborator of the PAASc.

Birkenmajer's accomplishments were also highly regarded by the central authorities in Warsaw. Hence, he was often charged with important international responsibilities, for example one finds his name among the Polish delegates to Paris for negotiations between Poland and Austria with regard to mutual claims as to cultural heritage in former Austrian Galicia (1924), or three missions (1925–1927) to Leningrad and Moscow in Soviet Russia as expert of the Polish government concerning the revindication of the Polish cultural heritage.[3] Participation in these legations alongside important scholarly publica-

[1] Swedish repositories hold numerous materials seized as booty during the Polish-Swedish wars of the 17th and early 18th c., in particular in Warmia, the region where Copernicus spent most of his life.

[2] The full dissertation never appeared in print; only its shortened version in French: A. Birkenmajer, *Henri Bate de Malines, astronome et philosophe du XIII*e *siècle*.

[3] See p. 143, n. 1. See also J. Zathey, *Działalność Aleksandra Birkenmajera* ... , p. 209.

tions paved his way to international recognition, and to numerous positions in Polish and international academic organisations.[1]

In 1930, Birkenmajer received the habilitation degree in the history of science. However, the university chair in history of the exact sciences which he aimed at (the same that was occupied by his father from 1897 to 1929), after Ludwik Antoni died, was suspended and later on closed down altogether. Thus, in 1937, Aleksander went through the habilitation procedure once again, this time in library science, and as a result in 1938, was promoted to professorship in library science.

In 1934, Birkenmajer married Antonina Gajewska (1900–1996), with whom he had three daughters. Antonina like Aleksander's mother was also a personality of note. Professionally, she was a schoolteacher. During the German occupation of Cracow, risking her life, she was active in clandestine secondary schooling of the Polish youth.

Early in 1939, Birkenmajer became the director of the University Library in Poznań. He was not given the opportunity to work there long. With the outbreak of World War II, he evacuated with his family to eastern Poland. When the hostilities ceased, he returned to Poznań, but there was no place for him there. The University Library was taken over by the Germans, and his apartment was confiscated; Poznań and the whole province of Wielkopolska were incorporated into the Reich, and the Polish intelligentsia was persecuted. So, Birkenmajer moved to his native city, only to be arrested alongside other professors of the Jagiellonian University within the notorious *Sonderaktion Krakau*. He remained in captivity for nearly a year, to be released in October 1940. He spent the next four years as an employee of the Staatsbibliothek Krakau [Jagiellonian Library], where he was involved in underground teaching at the supressed University. He also never ceased to continue research activities, albeit to a limited extent. In August 1944, Birkenmajer was dismissed from the Staatsbibliothek Krakau under the charge of sabotage, for hiding manuscripts that were supposed to be relocated to Germany. With this dismissal, his personal safety became highly precarious. He spent the last few months of the war carefully avoiding the vigilance of the occupiers.

The end of World War II opened a new stage in Birkenmajer's life. Between the years 1945 and 1951, he engaged in the reconstruction and reorganisation of libraries in Poland. Initially, he was active in Poznań, and the neighbouring regions.[2] The energy, expertise, and commitment he displayed in that role convinced his ministerial superiors that he would be the best candidate for the post of director of the Jagiellonian Library in Cracow, which was vacated by Edward Kuntze. He assumed these new responsibilities on 1 July 1947. Over the next few years, he transformed the Jagiellonian Library into a national centre of professional training for librarians. His activities in this respect markedly assisted the Polish libraries in assuring support from abroad. His personal input

[1] For only a partial listing, see J. Dobrzycki, *Aleksander Birkenmajer jako historyk nauki*, p. 171.

[2] For a detailed discussion of his works, see R. Nowicki, *Działalność Aleksandra Birenmajera ...* .

into the reconstruction of library activities in Poland and abroad brought him the honorary fellowship of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (1947).

In October 1951, Birkenmajer was granted full professorship accompanied with a ministerial transfer to a newly established Chair of Library Science at the University of Warsaw. It was his responsibility to organise the new unit, alongside with its training profile and the content of the courses. Thus, he had to move to Warsaw, where he spent the remaining years of his life, sharing his time between the University and the Polish Academy of Sciences [Polska Akademia Nauk].

Birkenmajer's experience and expertise in matters of libraries and librarianship were unquestioned. All the interwar period he spent as an employee, and next as head of leading Polish research libraries. He was an acknowledged ministerial expert in matters related to book collections and repositories, often employed to help resolve issues of international range. During the post-war years, he was active in the reconstructing and reshaping of libraries in western and northern regions of the country. He had a higher doctorate (habilitation) in library science and authored theoretical works in the field. Birkenmajer's candidature for the role of creator of the projected leading school of librarianship in Poland was natural. And so, he started his new job with the beginning of 1952. Over the next years, training of librarians at the University of Warsaw developed from an optional specialisation for students of Polish philology to fully fledged independent studies concluding with a master's degree in library science.

But, the creation of the Chair of Library Science was a political decision, dictated by the desire of the regime to turn the Polish libraries into an ideological tool of Communist indoctrination. Birkenmajer could not openly confront the authorities, but he could execute the plan in such a way that it stressed the actual requirements of the work of a librarian—deep knowledge of library practice and its intellectual context: general history, the history of culture, of the book, of literature, and of learning. And by doing precisely that, he defied the ideological premises that underlay the motives of the decision-makers.[1]

At the Polish Academy of Sciences, Birkenmajer was involved in the creation of two important research organisations: the Committee for the History of Science, an all-national body responsible for coordinating research on the history of learning, and the Centre for the History of Science and Technology, a Warsaw-based research institute responsible for historical investigations into a wide spectrum of themes. In particular, the latter finally offered Birkenmajer what he hoped for in 1930—an institutionally based position that was devoted to work on the history of the exact sciences. Within the Centre, he managed the section for the history of mathematical, physical, chemical, and geo-sciences,

[1] For a more detailed account of his activities in the creation of university training of librarians at the UW, see J. Woźniak-Kasperek & J. Franke, *Kształcenie bibliotekarzy* ... , pp. 72–78.

and was the head of its scientific council, as well as member of editorial committees of its journal and numerous monograph series.[1]

With the early nineteen-sixties Birkenmajer's health started to deteriorate. Excessive work, harsh living conditions during the war and the first years of post-war reconstruction, as well as numerous institutional responsibilities, all took their toll. In 1965, he suffered two strokes, which eliminated him from active research work. Two years later, on 30 September 1967, he died.

Aleksander Birkenmajer left his mark on several research fields, mainly concerning the Middle Ages. His achievements include work in the history of philosophy, science, and the history of the manuscript book. He is also celebrated as one of the creators of modern library science in Poland. But, first and foremost Birkenmajer was a manuscript scholar, basing his articles on masterly expertise in palaeography, codicology, and related disciplines.[2] The long hours he spent inspecting medieval manuscripts not only brought about solid, primary-source-founded determinations, but also discoveries of writings widely considered irretrievably lost.[3] His most important discovery were the fragments from the *Quaternuli* of David of Dinant. The writings of David, alongside these of Amalric of Bène, were condemned in 1210, and as such considered by modern scholars as not having been preserved.[4] Birkenmajer never found the time to prepare a critical edition of these texts, but encouraged his disciple Marian Kurdziałek to do it.[5]

Most of his professional life, Birkenmajer worked as an active librarian, usually at managerial positions: head of manuscript division or director of library. As such, he had to deal with organisational as well as substantive issues. Experience gathered over the years of library work resulted among other things in theoretical reflexions, a considerable part of which concerned the role of libraries in the society, training of librarians, and library collaboration. He also devoted effort to themes rarely cultivated by humanists, such as the functionality and technical aspects of library buildings.[6]

Birkenmajer's research concerning the history of science focused on three major topics. He devoted a number of detailed studies to Witelo, an important thirteenth-century Silesian theorist of optics, bringing to light his *curriculum vitæ* and writings. He published numerous biographical articles concerning fifteenth-century Cracovian scholars who were instrumental in elevating astronomy to its medieval high-point at this University – the so-called *Cracovian*

[1] See W. Sygocki, *Geneza Komitetu Historii Nauki i Techniki PAN ...* , A. M. Birkenmajer, *Biographie d'Aleksander Birkenmajer*, p. XIX-XX. After several reorganisations, the Centre became the contemporary L. & A. Birkenmajer Institute for the History of Science, PASc.

[2] For a bibliography of his works, see A. M. Birkenmajer, *Bibliographie d'Aleksander Birkenmajer*.

[3] Some of his manuscript discoveries are listed in: J. Zathey, *Działalność Aleksandra Birkenmajera ...* , pp. 203–207.

[4] See M. Olszewski, *Aleksander Birkenmajer jako historyk filozofii*, pp. 66–67.

[5] See *Davidis de Dinanto Quaternulorum fragmenta*.

[6] See H. Lipska, *Wspomnienie o pracy Aleksandra Birkenmajera ...* & J. Wojakowski, *Wkład Aleksandra Birkenmajera ...* .

astronomical school. Apart from that, Birkenmajer continued his father's works on Copernicus, concentrating on philosophical and methodological foundations of the discovery of the great astronomer from Toruń. He also was active in the preparation of the critical edition of Book I of *De Revolutionibus*.[1]

Aleksander Birkenmajer never considered himself a historian of philosophy, yet his contribution to the history of philosophy was considerable and lasting. His incursions into that realm resulted from his primary source studies, and the requirements these studies presented. Thus, his accomplishments were centred on the reception of Aristotle during the Middle Ages in Latin Europe, more precisely, on the translations of his works and on the commentaries that these inspired. Birkenmajer established the content of the so-called *medieval Aristotle*, its basic chronology, and typology. His research of early translations of Aristotle led him to a novel conclusion that it was the twelfth-century physicians and naturalists who discovered Aristotle well before the thirteenth-century philosophers and theologians. This solidly documented argument, presented in Oslo, in 1928, brought the Polish scholar wide recognition. This success was well earned. Manuscript studies directed his attention also to the translations of works by the Arab philosopher Averroes, and to the clarification of several erroneous convictions, previously widely accepted by historians.[2]

A special place in Birkenmajer's research activity was dedicated to the history of the book. He elaborated his own concept of book history, which had much in common with present-day codicology. It stressed the importance of the material side of the codex and all aspects of its production and circulation. He was also noted as one of the recognised authorities in historical book bindings.[3]

In the face of all the above-mentioned achievements, it is not surprising that alongside G. Lacombe, M. Dulong, and A. Franceschini, Birkenmajer became one of the chief contributors of the first volume of *Aristoteles Latinus*. He continued collaborating with this project for many years afterwards, but the political conditions in post-war Eastern Europe were not favourable for such enterprises. And so, after the war, his activity on the international scene was far less significant than previously.

4. *Corpus Philosphorum Medii Aevi*

World War I terminated with a particularly opportune result for the Polish people. All three powers that towards the end of the 18th c., annihilated the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, although representing two opposite sides of the conflict, found themselves among the defeated. Germany succumbed to the

[1] See B. Olszewska, J. Dobrzycki & M. Kurdziałek, *Aleksander Birkenmajer (1890–1967)*, pp. 113–115 & J. Dobrzycki, *Aleksander Birkenmajer jako historyk nauki*.

[2] See B. Olszewska, J. Dobrzycki & M. Kurdziałek, *Aleksander Birkenmajer (1890–1967)*, p. 116, M.-Th. D'Alverny, *Hommage à Alexandre Birkenmajer*, J. B. Korolec, *Avant-propos*, M. Kurdziałek, *Udział ks. Konstantego Michalskiego i Aleksandra Birkenmajera ...* & M. Olszewski, *Aleksander Birkenmajer jako historyk filozofii*.

[3] See A. Lewicka-Kamińska, *Dorobek naukowy Aleksandra Birkenmajera ...* & B. Bieńkowska, *Aleksandra Birkenmajera koncepcja historii książki*.

armies of the Entente Cordiale, Austria-Hungary as a result of internal frictions disintegrated into a number of small national states, while Russia with the Bolshevik Revolution embarked upon the long and painful process of turning from a Tsarist regime to a Soviet one. Poles, and other smaller European nations, benefited from this historical chance to regain independence and create their modern states. Among the advantages provided by this new situation, was the possibility for Poland to make an unrestrained entry into the scientific life of the continent, and participate in it under its own name. Already in 1919, representatives of the PAASc were invited to participate in the Conseil Internationale des Recherches—an organisation for advancing exact and experimental sciences, and the IUA which encompassed the humanities and social sciences. Officially, PAASc joined the Union in 1922.[1]

During subsequent conventions of the Union, Polish delegates submitted several international research projects, the majority of which found little favour in the eyes of the gathered community. But in 1928, at a meeting in Brussels, Konstanty Michalski presented his proposal of a *Corpus Philosophorum Medii Aevi*, which was accepted for further deliberations, and after necessary alterations matured into the renowned *Aristoteles Latinus* Project.[2] Although the original idea of the *Corpus Philosophorum Medii Aevi* came from Michalski, a scholar who had no reservations as to embarking upon wide-ranging and ambitious ventures, he had the support of his younger colleague, Aleksander Birkenmajer, a man of detail and competences ranging into the exact sciences. Together, they came up with a plan that could not be simply disregarded.

Undeniably, the origins of what finally became the *Aristoteles Latinus* project must be looked for in the situation of the history of medieval philosophy at the beginning of the 20th c. During the previous decades, after centuries of depreciation, historians finally changed their approach to that phase of Western thought, and turned to studying original medieval texts, and interpreting them in their historical context. With time, this new attitude brought considerable achievements. Scholars like Martin Grabmann, Pierre Duhem, and many others established the foundations of modern views on scholasticism, development of the sciences, etc. Nevertheless, many issues still remained unresolved, and among them the medieval reception of Aristotle, as well as of Arabic and Jewish thinkers. Generally, studies on medieval philosophy, after an initial move forward which brought the field to a new level, reached the phase when further progress was practically impossible without systematic research of a much wider scope of texts that awaited in plenty in the repositories scattered all around Europe.[3]

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[1] See M. Willaume, *Udział Polski w pracach Union Académique Internationale (1919–1939)*, pp. 369–373 & M. Markowski, *Konstanty Michalski projektodawcą* Aristoteles Latinus.

[2] In 1931, Michalski published a detailed description of his idea. See K. Michalski, *Corpus Philosophorum Medii Aevi*. For this project and its subsequent results see A. Usowicz, *Corpus Philosophorum Medii Aevi*.

[3] See P. B. Rossi & L. Bianchi, *The Aristoteles Latinus Project ...* , pp. 10–11, M. Kurdziałek, *Udział ks. Konstantego Michalskiego i Aleksandra Birkenmajera ...* , pp. 83–87 & M. Olszewski, *Aleksander Birkenmajer jako historyk filozofii*, pp. 64–65, with a basic bibliography of the subject.

At that time, Michalski and Birkenmajer joined the community of researchers working on scholasticism. Both had considerable experience in manuscript studies and acknowledged results. They had access to the significant Cracovian manuscript repositories, comprising together ca 3000 volumes, the majority of which bore witness to the importance of the fifteenth century University of Cracow. Researching these manuscripts brought Michalski to the conclusion that the philosophical and theological ideas discussed in Cracow in the 15th c. must reflect earlier disputes in Paris and Oxford. Thus, he turned to these materials and encountered Aristotelian commentaries and the translations of Aristotle's works. Birkenmajer made a similar journey, with the difference that he was interested primarily in natural philosophy. Working within the same intellectual milieu and the same University, they remained in contact at least from the early 1920s.[1]

There is little doubt as to the fact that it was Michalski, who came up with the idea of the *Corpus Philosophorum Medii Aevi*; ambitious projects of this sort were characteristic for his way of thinking. Already in 1917, at the meeting of the Commission for the History of Philosophy of the PAASc, Michalski advocated the launching of a series of critical editions of fifteenth-century philosophical treatises by Polish and foreign authors, based on the manuscripts from the Jagiellonian Library in Cracow; the project was taken up only after World War II, by his disciples and their colleagues.[2] In 1928, he was appointed chair of the PAASc committee responsible for the plan of translating all the works of Aristotle into Polish. This initiative was also concluded in the second half of the 20th c. In 1929, he proposed the edition of the body of correspondence of the most important Polish philosophers of the 19th c. The idea of this *Epistolarium* was unanimously accepted by the PAASc, but it still awaits fruition.

Michalski presented the first outline of the *Corpus Philosphorum Medii Aevi* at a sitting of the Commission for the History of Philosophy of the PAASc. As a result, this concept became the subject of subsequent discussions with Aleksander Birkenmajer, and matured in the official proposition of the PAASc presented by Michalski at the 1928 meeting of the IUA in Brussels. The plan comprised a publishing project of two levels. On a wider scale, it would encompass works of Jewish, Arabic, and Christian philosophers that influenced Western European thought, while the narrower one would concentrate on Latin philosophers and the Latin translations. Hence, the whole would consist of three series: (1.) editions of the Latin translations of Greek and Arabic versions of works by Aristotle; (2.) editions of original works and Latin translations of Arabic and Jewish philosophers; (3.) editions of commentaries and original texts of Latin philosophers. Such a project would bring together and systematise the knowledge of medieval philosophy as a whole. Since the scope of such an endeavour exceeded the capabilities of any single learned organisation, it could

[1] Their mutual contacts have not been studied as yet, although there are plenty of source materials: Michalski's papers are kept at the Archives of the Congregation of the Mission in Cracow, while the majority of Birkenmajer's documents are at the Jagiellonian Library.

[2] See M. Markowski, *Konstanty Michalski projektodawcą* Aristoteles Latinus, pp. 53–55.

only be realised by collective effort, and the International Union of Academies seemed to Michalski the appropriate forum to undertake such an initiative.

The response of the assembled academics was positive. Michalski was asked to enlarge upon his proposal in writing, and to circulate this text among the members of the Union. Thus, he prepared a special brochure, which was printed in Cracow in fifty copies and distributed to all academies of the Union.[1] In May 1929, during the next meeting of the UAI, it was decided to embark upon this enterprise and call into being a special commission responsible for it. There were however reservations as to the scope of the enterprise. Early in 1930, this special commission comprising K. Michalski, G. Lacombe, J. H. Baxter, and V. Ussani, convened in Paris to discuss the details of the project. Michalski was elected its chair. The commission decided to limit the scope of the works, at least for the time being, to the Latin translations of the works by Aristotle. In the following months, A. Birkenmajer joined the team as one of the principal investigators. Gradually, his contributions to the project gave him a lasting title to be considered one of the chief contributors of the interwar period.

Such were the origins of the *Aristoteles Latinus* project. With time, other research proposals included in the CPhMAe concerning Arabic, Greek, and Jewish influence on medieval Western European thought also found their way to fruition. The subsequent history of these projects and the input of Michalski and Birkenmajer into the development of *Aristoteles Latinus* require a separate study that will surely be taken up by historians of learning.

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[1] See [K. Michalski], *Projet de l'Académie Polonaise des Sciences et des Lettres ...* . Research conducted by P. Rossi revealed that there is only one copy extant of this brochure (Archiwum Nauki PAN i PAU w Krakowie, PAU I–158). The brochure is not signed, nor is there any information on the date and place of print. The latter can be established with the help of archival materials among which it is preserved. As to its authorship, some authors have voiced opinions that Birkenmajer was a co-author of this text. But, since the brochure is not included in Birkenmajer's bibliography, compiled with great care and competence by his daughter Aleksandra, and because older biographical works concerning K. Michalski, written by people who knew him personally, attribute unequivocally this brochure to him only, one can safely conclude that Michalski was its sole author.

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