



THERE IS NO SUCH STREET IN BERLIN PRZEMYSŁAW MARCINIAK

Przemysław Marciniak was born in 1976 in Ruda Śląska, Poland. He graduated in Classics in 1999 from the University of Silesia. In the years 1996–98, he studied in Warsaw at the Collegium Invisibile. During his Ph.D. studies, he spent a semester at King’s College London. In 2007, he spent four months in Belfast as a Visiting Fellow of the British Academy. He has published on Byzantine drama, theater, and the reception of Byzantium in literature and culture in Poland and abroad. – Address: Aleja Majowa 27/15, 44-100 Gliwice, Poland.

“There is no such street in Berlin.” This was the conclusion of the very first colloquium I attended in Berlin – the conclusion of the taxi drivers outside of Ostbahnhof immediately upon my arrival in Berlin. Fortunately I managed to convince one of them to double check and he discovered that Wallotstraße exists indeed. I am bringing this story not in order to undermine the talents of the Berlin taxi drivers, but to present the only problem I encountered during my stay in Berlin.

My three-month stay in Berlin was like a three-month stay in academic heaven. When just before Christmas I had to leave, I felt like Buffy the Vampire Slayer being pulled out from paradise by her friends (this not-so-learned remark is justified by the fact that, to my deepest joy, there was a person among the Fellows who edited a scholarly book on my favorite TV show).

At Wiko I did things that I would not normally do in my real life – I went to many scientific lectures whose topics alone were terrifying for a simple Byzantinist. And I found them extremely interesting. A few days ago I finished a chapter of my habilitation in which

I described the use of Social Darwinism in research on Byzantine history – thanks to all the evolutionary biologists I met in Berlin, I felt quite at home with this topic. I think I do not have to add that I had a chance to meet many fantastic people – but this is obvious, only this kind of people are awarded Wissenschaftskolleg fellowships.

The other unusual thing was to speak (or perhaps to try to speak) German. I decided to use it as the only language, then made a concession to use it as the main language, in conversations with the German-speaking Fellows and staff. Sometimes this meant that during a conversation I uttered one sentence (very unusual for me), sometimes that uttering one sentence took longer than I expected (I am very thankful to all for their patience).

Of course concerts, operas, small talk, and evolutionary biology lectures were not my only (or main) activities during the stay in Berlin. The most important one was my research. I spent most of my time researching the sense of humor in Byzantine satires as well as the reception of Byzantium in literature between the 17th and 20th centuries. This was possible owing to a wonderful library that reminded me of a genie. With the small difference that I had a virtually unlimited number of wishes! And there was no bottle. I remember that during one of the parties in October somebody told me that there was a person who had already ordered over one hundred books. Well, the word was spreading fast, I thought, but the librarians later assured me that they had dealt in their careers with the craziest scholars.

During my stay in Wiko I had an opportunity to meet Professor Johannes Niehoff-Panagiotidis. A very rare occasion indeed to meet a fellow Byzantinist – Professor Panagiotidis invited me to his lectures at the Free University, which was an excellent occasion to listen to fascinating stories on Byzantine literature and one more opportunity to improve my German.

I could go on with the story, for so many things happened during those three months. But I think it is time to stop and say what some people consider the most beautiful word in Polish – *dziękuję*. Thank you all to the wonderful staff and amazing Fellows for everything!