

Małgorzata Skowronek

"The Tale of the Prophet Isaiah. The Destiny and Meanings of an Apocryphal Text", Ivan Biliarsky, Leiden–Boston 2013 : [recenzja]

Studia Ceranea : journal of the Waldemar Ceran Research Centre for the History and Culture of the Mediterranean Area and South-East Europe 4, 315-318

2014

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Книгу завершают синтетически представленные выводы, важные методологические постановки для дальнейших исследований (р. 169–174) и список использованной литературы. В заключение стоит отметить, что хотя представляемая здесь публикация и является своего рода подведением итогов исследований сборника «Различные потребности» и в целом творчества Якова Крайкова, которые Марианна Цибранска-Костова проводила на протяжении многих лет, ее интерес

к этой проблематике не иссяк, о чем свидетельствуют новые статьи, развивающие некоторые тезисы и положения, представленные в книге⁵.

Иван Н. Петров (Лодзь)

⁵ Cf. M. TSIBRANSKA-KOSTOVA, *Mount Athos and Venetian Cyrillic printing in the 16th century. The First Bulgarian Printer Jacob Kraykov Interprets the Athonite Legendary History*, ОСП 80.1, 2014, p. 143–164.

IVAN BILIARSKY, *The Tale of the Prophet Isaiah. The Destiny and Meanings of an Apocryphal Text*, Leiden–Boston 2013, pp. 310.

The monograph lives its second life; the first one lasts since 2011, when was edited in Bulgaria and entitled *The Tale of Prophet Isaiah and forming a political ideology in Early Medieval Bulgaria*¹. The English edition is not just a translation. As the author emphasizes in the preface, it is significantly enlarged and enriched with ideas, some of which are new, others have been neglected in the Bulgarian version (p. XI).

The idea of Ivan Biliarsky's *Tale...* is based on commentary to the Medieval (11th cent.) text entitled: *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah of How an Angel Took Him to the Seventh Heaven*, also known as *The Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle of the 11th century*². Let me remind the source text, being the object of the study. The *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle* is preserved in only one copy, rather late – dating back the 17th cent., the so called Kičevo codex, now in the archives of the State Historical Museum in Moscow (Khudov collection, № 123). For the first time the text was published at the turn of the 19th cent. and ever since is drawing attention of medievalists, mostly historians and students of belle-lettres. The text itself originates from the 11th-13th cent. compila-

tion of another *Vision of the Prophet Isaiah*, used as the beginning of the tale, with characteristic narration using 1 sing. (*I, Prophet Isaiah, beloved among the prophets of our Lord God Jesus Christ, came on God's command to tell you what will happen in the last days of humankind all over the earth. [...] the Heavenly Father [...] sent out me his holy angel and lifted me up from the earth to the heavenly heights...*, p. 13). The text is expanded with short narratives concerning history of the Bulgarian state in times of particular rulers, until coming out of certain violent swindlers called *Pechenegs, lawless and infidel* (p. 21). Ivan Biliarsky presents *The Bulgarian apocryphal chronicle* as one of most interesting, but – simultaneously – most ambiguous and equivocal medieval Bulgarian literary texts. The analysis of the text is additionally complicated by lack of its ending.

The commentary and interpretation of Ivan Biliarsky are organised in six chapters and three extensive „excurses”, appendixes, being an additional comment to selected questions, only apparently further from the main course of the discourse.

The first chapter, *The Text of the Literary Work and Its Manuscript Tradition*, is of source character. It contains edition of the old-Bulgarian text and its English translation. The edition is accompanied by reproductions of the manuscript leaves. The context of the literary convoy, in which the *Chronicle...* is rewritten/copied, seems to be very interesting: texts in memory of Serbian and Bulgarian saints, sermons originat-

¹ Ив. БИЛЯРСКИ, *Сказание на Исаяя Пророка и формирането на политическата идеология на ранносредновековна България*, София 2011 [Поредица *История и книжнина*].

² Though Biliarsky protests against calling *The Tale of the Prophet Isaiah*, *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle*, I do it in order to distinguish the source text and the monograph.

ing in the Eastern part of the Slavia Orthodoxa area by St Cyril of Turovo, but also the so called apocryphal prayers to St Trifon the Martyr. The codex contains also another text coming from the Slavonic milieu, not directly connected with *The Tale*: a compilation of Jeremiah's Paralipomenon and Baruch's Revelation. Biliarsky handles a question of possible influence of printed books for the contents of the manuscript – of *The Book for Various Occasions* by Jacob Kraykov, a Bulgarian publisher active in the second half of the 16th cent. in Venice.

The second chapter, *Tale of the Prophet Isaiah in the context of Medieval Literature and Modern Researches*, is a detailed analysis of the text's origins. It begins with an extended historical discourse, presenting the fate of the text's editions and thesis and speculations about its origins and sense, with a review of selected translations into contemporary languages (Bulgarian, English, French)³. An important problem is a dominating in studies devoted to *The Chronicle*, question of interpreting it as a patriotic and anti-Byzantine text, which makes Biliarsky to oppose and argue with; he emphasizes, that *the compiler's focus on the Bulgarian past, which he presented in a heroic light, does not suggest any opposition to the Empire* (p. 34). The author underlines, that *The Tale* rather seems to be a result of not only loyalty, but even sense of the unity of the Bulgarians and the Byzantines, based on the best grounds: Christianity, and that the Christian identity prevails over the national one (p. 35).

Chapter two contains also a polemic with a thesis – presented in many studies on *The Chronicle*... – that the text has a sign of Bogomil origin (J. Ivanov) or, in general, of 'apocryphal' one (p. 39–43). It discusses also problem of the milieu and time of the *Chronicle's* origin, its potential recipients and spread, including character of its components.

³ It's worth mentioning, that a Polish translation of the Bulgarian apocryphal chronicle also exists, see: *Bułgarska kronika apokryficzna. Słowo proroka Izajasza o tym, jak został przez anioła wyniesiony o siódmego nieba*, trans. M. SKOWRONEK, [in:] *Apokryfy i legendy starotestamentowe Słowian południowych*, ed. G. MINCZEW, M. SKOWRONEK, Kraków 2006, p. 62–69.

The third chapter, entitled *The Chosen People and the Promised Land*, the *Tale's*... author presents an idea of the so called royal messianism, God's theocracy. The reader finds out a picture and analysis of the prophetic elements of the text: vision of the Prophet Isaiah and how it is realized in terms of the *Bulgarian chronicle*... Here a reader can find description of the figure of Isaiah against a background of texts typical for medieval literary tradition, especially within narrations: *About the Future Times and About the Kings, and About the Antichrist Who Is to Come and About the Last Times* (the very beginning of the *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle* comes into close textological relations with the last one). Here there is presented an idea – born in late antiquity and evolving in Byzantium (later also in Bulgaria) – of the Empire as New Israel and of the promised land converting into a holy land of the Christians. On the basis of this model, Constantinople (a specific synthesis of Rome and Jerusalem) – and, later on, the Bulgarian capital cities: Preslav and Turnovo – become New Jerusalem. Biliarsky attempts to identify the literary "promise land" (Karvuna = land of Bulgarians) with Southern Slavic territories and boundaries. It's interesting to focus on the motif of a town: its origins, of a town understood/interpreter as a holy place, identified with state and state authorities. Toponyms listed in the text are presented in a symbolic context of their role in Bulgaria's and Bulgarians' history (p. 127).

A significant part of this chapter is an attempt of reconstruction of identity of selected rulers-builders and temples; some of them are described/depicted as 'more legendary', others – as 'more historical' ones. Kings-founders, builders carry – in the light of the *Bulgarian chronicle*... – features of prophets or even half-gods; the motif of building a town has a symbolic meaning, in some respects similar to the creation act of the world.

Chapter four, *The Divinely Chosen King, Humble to God: Tsar Izot, or Davidic Royalty*, interpretes the figure of the tsar Izot, *who slew Ozia, the king of the East with his armies, and Goliath, the sea Frank [...]*, in the years of whom there were many great cities (*Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle*, p. 16). In Ivan Biliarsky's belief, it's difficult to find out this king's prototype

in any historical ruler. He rather seems to be a symbolic character, constructed in likeness of the king David – especially, that his antagonist is ‘Goliath’ – the sea Frank, that means *a person connected with Western Europe and the Catholic world, not in the narrow sense of someone of Frank nationality or related to the Frankish state* (p. 136). In this chapter we find also interpretations of other characters, as Ozia, defeated by Izot. What is drawing the reader’s attention, is a selection of biblical stories, being simultaneously background and pivot for understanding/interpreting some fragments of the *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle*.

Chapter five, *The Renovator King: Tsar Ispor and the Mosaic Royalty: Constantine and the Royalty of the Ruler-Converter to Christianity*, is devoted to a picture of a ruler-renovator, *one of the most characteristic images in Byzantine civilisation* (p. 163). In this model we may find – except Constantine the Great – echoes of Christ Redemptor The New Adam and the prophet Moses, which can be seen e.g. in a report about tsar Ispor, *a child carried in a basket for three years* (p. 15). It’s only an introduction to extent reflections on Moses in both Hellenistic and Medieval Christian writings; it’s also an introduction for presenting some archetypes recorded in literature of the Southern Slavs, typical especially for stories (also myths and legends) referring to Bulgarian rulers – or only founders – like Boris-Michael, Simeon or Peter. Some parallels between the history of the Byzantine Imperium and the First Bulgarian Kingdom, analysed by Biliarsky, seem to serve as a narrative framework of the *Bulgarian apocryphal chronicle*.

The last, sixth chapter (*Kings and Their Names*) is devoted to *those of the characters mentioned in Tale of the Prophet Isaiah whose historical identification is somewhat problematic* (p. 205). The proposed by Ivan Biliarsky attempts of deciphering identities of the *Bulgarian apocryphal chronicle* heroes, comes out not only from looking for the historical prototype, but rather needs seeking *fora constructed ideological character borrowed from the biblical or some other tradition* (p. 205). In the context of the entire text, the characters constructed this way may have greater significance for its meaning and force of its impact than historical Bulgarian rulers.

The monograph is provide with three interesting “excurses” (appendixes). The first one, entitled *The List of Names of the Bulgar Princes: Between Myth and History*, is devoted to particularities of a rulers list, preserved in three manuscript copies; a list included to a world history chronicle; the second one, *The Birth of the Founding Kings*, follows a myth of miraculous birth of rulers “sent by God”; the third one – *The Tabernacle of the Empire or the State-Church* – presents a motif *renovatio imperii* as recorded in literary texts referring to the origin of the Second Bulgarian Empire (p. 269).

Ivan Biliarsky suggests to read the Bulgarian apocryphal chronicle in a context of a process of building a new – Christian – identity of the Bulgarians. His extremely interesting studium aims at presenting a special figurativeness, signs and symbols present in the *Bulgarian chronicle*. In fact, it’s a “tale of a tale”: history of meanings, presentations, imaginations and their interpretations in changing geopolitical conditions. Biliarsky presents an influence of a (Biblical) text into forming a political doctrine; he offers a religious interpretation of a state and political ideology. However, it’s worthwhile mentioning a Polish voice in discussion on the *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle*, especially, that there is a voice excluded in both variants of the monograph. In his paper from 2007 on aims and ideology of the *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle*, Kiril Marinow focuses on selected elements of the source text, offering some original interpretations⁴. One of them concerns a fragment, where God orders Isaiah to take *one third part of the Cumans* and lead them to the land called Karvuna (p. 14). Unlike elder studies on the *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle*, Marinow finds here out an evidence, that the new Christian people are chosen: “the third part” is – in light of the Book of the Prophet Zechariah (13, 8–9) – faithful servants, *refined* and heard out⁵. Moreover, the Cumans were to be ‘chosen’ still before accepting Christianity, which should be an evidence for the depth

⁴ K. MARINOW, *Kilka uwag na temat ideologiczno-eschatologicznej wymowy Bułgarskiej kroniki apokryficznej*, FE 6/7, 2007, p. 61–75.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 69–70.

of God's purpose. What should be emphasized, Marinow suggests a need to verify a belief on the 'messiah idea' in the text; in his opinion, majority of scholars *equate this idea with God's choice of Bulgarians*, when *there is nothing in the text what indicates, that its author intends to point out suffering of the Bulgarians, which could set the other inhabitants of the world free from their sins and fallen nature*⁶.

Emphasizing the presence of Bible texts tradition in medieval history, in history of medieval Slavonic literature, using prosopography for describing characters acting in the text, interpretation of sources and meanings of

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

ИВАН БИЛЯРСКИ, Палеологовият синодик в славянски превод [Paleologian variant of Synodicon in Slavic translation], Университетско издателство „Св. Климент Охридски“, София 2013, pp. 117 [= История и книжнина].

The book presented here is an edition of Slavic Synodicon placed in the manuscript of the Library of the Romanian Academy ref. 307 (XVI c.). Edited source is accompanied by not very extensive, but exhaustive overview of philological and historical issues related to the text, its creation and subsequent functioning.

The manuscript attracted moderate interest so far. Primarily it drew the attention of scholars studying history of Bogomilism, because of the Slavic translation of Athos gramma, relating to the famous controversy of 1344¹. Though the existence of this text has long been known, its content remained unknown from various causes for a long time. Jean Gouillard claimed in 1967 that knowing its content would increase our knowledge of Bogomils in the fourteenth century, but the manuscript, according to him, was in a terrible condition and its reading was not possible². Thus, he repeated the opinion of Alexander Jacimirskij who has seen the manuscript at the beginning of the twentieth century³.

¹ A. RIGO, *L'assemblea generale athonita del 1344 su un gruppo di monaci bogomili*, CS 5, 1984, p. 475–506.

² J. GOUILLARD, *Le Synodikon de l'Orthodoxie. Édition et commentaire*, TM 2, 1967, p. 237.

³ А.И. ЯЦИМИРСКИЙ, *Славянския и руския*

a literary text leads to quit the 'national' understanding of the *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle* and makes it an evidence of significance of the Byzantine-Slavonic Commonwealth. One of the *Tale's* reviewers defined it as a crucial text – from historical and historiographical point of view; as a text beginning a new era of Bulgarian historical thought⁷. Maybe this opinion shall convince the up-to-now unconvinced ones to get acquainted with this valuable monograph.

Małgorzata Skowronek (Łódź)

⁷ Т. КАПРИЕВ, *Историография без комплекси*, Кул 37(2655), 4.11.2011 [http://www.kultura.bg/bg/article/view/18950, 27.05.2014].

Antonio Rigo, on its turn, postulated in 1984 to publish the text saying that looking into the Slavic version of the anathemas against Athos Bogomils would give us a complete picture of the events of 1344⁴. It was only in his book of 1989 that the Italian scholar took into account the content of Slavic translation, which turned out to be not particularly interesting, being an almost literal translation of the Greek gramma⁵.

The publication of the Italian researcher did not put a stop to speculations regarding the possibility of deciphering the anathemas from BAR 307. Already in 1993 Dimităr Angelov in his monography of Bogomilism has sent the reader to the manuscript, pointing out that it was unfortunately illegible⁶. The edition of the manuscript presented here will finally dissipate these misunderstanding stretching out nearly half a century.

рукописи румънских библиотек, СБОРЯС 79, 1905, p. 479.

⁴ A. RIGO, *op. cit.*, p. 488.

⁵ ИДЕМ, *Monaci esicasti e monaci bogomili. Le accuse di messalianismo e bogomilismo rivolte agli esicsti ed il problema dei rapporti tra esicasmo e bogomilismo*, Firenze 1989, p. 144–145.

⁶ Д. АНГЕЛОВ, *Богомилиите*, София 1993, p. 461, note 4.