

## SHORT REVIEW

by Professor DSc. Ana Stoykova (Institute for Literature at BAS)  
of the academic contributions of Assist. Prof. Dr. Ewelina Drzewiecka,  
candidate for the position of Associated Professor  
in the Cyrillo-Methodian Research Center at BAS

Dr. Evelina Drzewiecka has been dealing with the problems of Bulgarian literature and culture for more than ten years —both her MA thesis and her doctoral dissertation, defended at the Institute of Western and Southern Slavic Studies at the University of Warsaw under the guidance of the eminent Polish scholar Prof. Grażyna Szwat-Galabova are related to this topic. Apart from Bulgarian studies, E. Drzewiecka also graduated in Theology and this qualification expands the scope of her research interests. Her publications in Bulgarian studies include a significant number of articles, encyclopedic entries, reviews and surveys of international scholarly conferences, which present her as a talented, ambitious, hardworking and competent researcher in specific fields, such as literature and religion in modernity, history of ideas, biblical motives and their interpretation in literature and culture, etc. Her list of publications includes two monographs—one is a publication of her PhD dissertation on the interpretations of the Judas Iscariot's biblical story in Bulgarian literature of the 20th and early 21th century, and the second is her habilitation work “Jubilee and Modern. The Cyril and Methodius Narrative during Socialism in Bulgaria”(2020).

This book is the first attempt of its kind to consider one of the most important “narratives” in the Bulgarian cultural consciousness—the work of Cyril and Methodius and the merit of Bulgarians for its preservation, through the prism of its ideological uses during socialism in Bulgaria. Due to its unique character, the cult of the Holy Thessalonian Brethren was one of the most ideologically exploited cults in the Middle Ages and later in the National revival, and therefore this question has been raised in some of the previous Cyrillo-Methodian studies. In her work, however, Drzewiecka choosed to interpret this issue in a new way, including as one of the aspects of her analysis the scholarly interpretation itself, ie. the participation of the so-called intellectual elites in the ideological game of the regime. She tried to make the most complete and objective analysis of the complex issues, relying on her position “from outside”— as a researcher, unencumbered by the ideological pressure of communism (due to her belonging to a new generation), or by the inevitable for many Bulgarian scholars conscious or unconscious bias caused by the ideologisation and

“Bulgarianization” of Cyril and Methodius’ work in Bulgarian society in the second half of the twentieth century.

The book contains an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion, as well as illustrations, a bibliography and an English summary. Separate chapters are devoted to the two First Slavic teachers and to their disciples and followers; they are conceptually titled, with each title synthesizing the semantically charged / stereotypical perception of the object. In the “Introduction”, E. Drzewiecka presents her reasons for choosing the topic and introduces the issue, based on the J. and A. Assmann’s conception of the cultural memory. As a material for analysis, she chose the jubilee Cyrillo-Methodian collections as formative texts that synthesize both the role of the elites in the reproduction of memory and the semantic changes in the functionalization of the narrative about Cyril and Methodius and their disciples. She makes a critical review of the existing literature and substantiates her methodological approach—as a literary researcher, culturologist and historian, and as the most general methodological framework accepts the hermeneutics of P. Ricoeur, so she focuses on the narrative perspective and interprets Cyril and Methodius’ deed as a *story*, and not as a tradition, a myth or a heritage. The subject of the analysis is the meanings and the contextual conventions of the historical narrative, understood in the context of the Bulgarian modernity.

In the first chapter, entitled “The Culture of the Jubilee”, Drzewiecka makes an extensive retrospective review of power—culture relations in the decades after World War II in Bulgaria, when communism was a “universal culture of organized ostentation,” and traces the place of Cyril and Methodius’ deed in communist propaganda and its evolution. She concludes that the key elements were control and legitimacy, carried out through detailed planning and repetition of topics within organized public time and space; therefore, she believes, one can speak of a kind of ritual as a form of manifestation of power. Based on a number of theoretical works, Drzewiecka substantiates the nature of the jubilee as a phenomenon with a “special mnemonic potential” and of the jubilee literature, formed according to the principles of stylization and language formalization.

For me, the second chapter, “The Enlightener”, is especially valuable and interesting. In it, Drzewiecka analyses the interpretations of Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher’s image as a *dominant* (according to the classification of A. Megill) narrative during the Bulgarian socialism. She focuses her analysis on its development in the context of three micro-periods: the 50s, 60s and 70-80s of the twentieth century, which she successfully characterizes with the key words: revolution, education, culture. Based on a large number of analyzed texts—artistic and scholarly, emblematic for the historical and political micro-periods, she comes to

the important conclusion that some of the main elements of the dominant during the socialism narrative are part of the national narrative from the time of the Revival and of the interwar period, i.e. one can speak of continuity with regard to the criteria by which the Cyril and Methodius' deed is evaluated; however, she believes, under socialism the story developed, adapted to the new historical and political conditions. The close connection between the scholarly and the political discourse observed during this epoch is an inevitable consequence of the Marxist conception of the social role of the intelligentsia and science.

The third chapter, "The Performer", is dedicated to the figure of Methodius as part of the great narrative of the Thessalonian brethren. Drzewiecka finds that artistic and scholarly interpretations present his role as a secondary, in comparison with Constantine-Cyril, and him as an assistant and implementer of the common cause; the main reason for this she sees in the fact that he is not a creator, but only a translator and preacher. And since the cultural memory of Cyril and Methodius' deed is mainly reduced to the inventing the alphabet and to the creation of the Slavic script and culture, for Methodius there can be no independent place in the narrative. In this chapter, a considerable place is given to the question of the church reading and the (anti) theological interpretations of the Cyrillo-Methodian narrative and of the jubilee editions' language during socialism, of its politicization and propaganda. The author concludes that in the modern context, unlike the medieval one, the emphasis shifts from the religious to the national aspect of identity.

The fourth chapter of the book, "The Heirs", is dedicated to the disciples of the First Teachers. Here, too, there is a continuity, understood as immanent to the cultural memory, of the socialist narrative about the disciples, close to the interpretation of the narrative from the interwar period, which, in turn, is based on the Revival tradition. Drzewiecka considers two important concepts for the analysis of the period—"communist nationalism" and "secularization", and concludes that the Cyril and Methodius' deed is a very convenient tool for communist ideology, which allows to achieve a "symphony" of scientific and political discourse, between the state government and the scholars, as well as the church authorities. According to her, this harmony is manifested primarily in the plan of the ritual, during the organized ostentation and festivity, which include the Cyrillo-Methodian anniversaries.

E. Drzewiecka's book is a contributory and innovative research at a high scholarly level, which will be used by specialists not only through its results, but also as a methodological model for future research. The rich and accurate language and the good, albeit slightly heavy style with which it is written, arouse admiration, especially considering that the Bulgarian language is not native for the author. Unfortunately, I have to mention some

roughnesses in the language that create ambiguity, some inaccuracies (for example, the encyclical with which Pope John Paul II declared Constantine-Cyril and Methodius as co-patrons of Europe is *Egregiae Virtutis* from 1980, not *Slavorum Apostoli* of 1985, see p. 83) and a number of technical errors that should be cleared up before the text is printed.

The topic of E. Drzewiecka's habilitation work is a continuation of her earlier publications in this field, which are among the studies and articles presented for the competition. These are texts on various issues related in general to the functioning of Cyril and Methodius' deed in Bulgarian modern culture. Another important topic to which she has devoted her research concerns the processes of modernization in the Bulgarian context and, in particular, the place of the religious tradition in the conditions of modernity, considered through the prism of the so-called postsecular thought. Among them, several texts are especially important from a methodological point of view—the author presents there the terms and concepts related to the application of post-secular thought in contemporary humanities, and especially in Polish and Bulgarian context, focusing on the secular and ecclesiastical elites' narrative about the role of the Church, considering it through the prism of the influence of Western scholarly thought, etc. Here are her contributions to some fundamental ideas and concepts—modernity, secularization, education, religion, education, humanism, and their realization and function in the history of Bulgarian cultural modernity, which are included in the prestigious multivolume series “Leksykon idei wędrownych na słowiańskich Bałkanach XVIII-XXI w.” (“Lexicon of the migrating ideas on the Slavic Balkans 18th-21th century,” 2018-2019), edited by Prof. G. Szwat-Galabova.

I would like to draw attention to the fact that E. Drzewiecka not only participates in important research projects of the Cyrillo-Methodian Research Center and of the Institute of Slavic Studies of PAN as a competent and reliable young scholar, but also successfully presents herself as a coordinator of a Bulgarian-Polish research project. In 2016, she won a competition for funding a research project for a young scholar at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and recently it became clear that after a competition her research project will receive a grant from the Polish National Research Center. I will also mention the significant editorial and publishing activity of E. Drzewiecka, primarily as an editor, and since last year as editor-in-chief of the authoritative journal “*Slavia Meridionalis*”. I have had the opportunity to work in collaboration with her and I can say that she shows also in this area high professionalism, responsibility and editorial flair, amazing for a young scholar who has recently entered these activities.

Considering the scholarly contributions of Dr. Ewelina Drzewiecka, her high qualification, her significant experience in the implementation of innovative research projects, her depth, her diligent consistent work, her efficiency, I believe that she is a researcher with proven professionalism, who would be a valuable collaborator for any scholarly institution. That is why I will vote positively and will support the decision Ewelina Drewiecka to become Associate Professor in the professional field 2.1. Philology at the Cyrillo-Methodian Research Center at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

May 20, 2020

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'A. G. M.' followed by a long horizontal stroke.