

## ПРЕГЛЕД / ОБЗОРИ И РЕЦЕНЗИИ / SURVEY AND BOOK REVIEWS

*Gergana Ganeva (Sofia, Bulgaria)*

**A SPANISH ANTHOLOGY OF MATERIAL ON THE PRE-CHRISTIAN RELIGION OF THE SLAVS\***

*Fuentes para el estudio de la religión eslava precristiana.* Ed. y coord. J. A. Álvarez-Pedrosa Núñez. Zaragoza, Libros Pórtico, 2017. 505 p.

The book under review (transl. title: Sources of Research on the Pre-Christian Religion of the Slavs) written entirely in Spanish has been referred to by its authors as an anthology because its objective is to gather in one volume medieval written sources on the subject. The book, which is of impressive size (505 pages in total), consists of a short introduction, eight chapters, and references. Each of the chapters presents written sources in a particular language – Greek (1), Latin (2), Slavic (3–4–5), Old Icelandic (6), Arabic (7), sources with unclear attribution (8). The Slavic sources are divided into three

groups: South Slavic (3)<sup>1</sup> (the authors of the book use the term “Mediterranean Slavic”), East Slavic (4), and West Slavic (Old Czech) (5). The Polish texts are added to the Latin sources – for example “Annales seu cronicae incliti regni polonicae” by Jan Długosz. Perhaps the book’s best contribution is the fact that the medieval written sources collected by the authors have been translated into one of the West European languages – into Spanish. This might promote interest in Slavic antiquity in the hispanophone world. The book is the work of a large number of scholars, because it was necessary to translate from different languages into Spanish. It is also impressive that in some cases the translations have been made directly from the manuscripts and not from their follow-up publications.

---

\* This review was written with the support of project BG05M2OP001-2-009-0005 “Modern Palaeoslavonic and Medieval Studies“, financed under the Operational Programme Science and Education for Smart Growth, co-financed by the European Union through the European Structural and Investment Funds.

---

<sup>1</sup> The authors of the book use the term “Mediterranean Slavic”.

The whole structure of the book shows that the aim of the authors was to enlighten the reading public. Within each chapter of the collection the works that contain information about the pre-Christianity religion of the Slavs have been arranged chronologically. The texts have been entered with a numbering, which makes orientation in the book easy. Then the name of the author of the respective medieval texts is listed, and if the author is unknown – the most frequently used title of the text. There is a peculiar introduction to each author and text. It contains most general information about the historical, social, cultural and literary context, within which the medieval work has occurred. There follows a bibliography divided into three parts: the edition that is the source of the text translated into Spanish; other editions or translations into European languages; a bibliography of the major titles dealing with the analysed text. Each fragment translated into Spanish is preceded by data about where the passage of information is located in the medieval texts, and what is the context of its use. More than one fragment is given for some of the texts. For example, the text of the *Treatise against the Bogomils* is provided according to the publication made by Popruzhenko<sup>2</sup>, and three fragments have been selected, numbered respectively 3.3.1., 3.3.2., and 3.3.3. The first number corresponds to the number of the chapter (3 for South Slavic texts). The second number shows that this is the third quoted author or text among the South Slavic ones. The third number serves as numeration of fragments. It is indicated that the first fragment is on page 488v, and then it is clarified that in this part of the *Treatise*, Cosmas the

Presbyter, harshly attacks the Bogomils, because they are worse than the pagan idols and demons. Part 3.3.1. ends with a translation of the Slavic text into Modern Spanish. The medieval text itself, used as a source for the translation, has not been provided by the book authors. The same sequence of the exposition is followed both in the second and third fragments of the *Treatise against the Bogomils*. Overall the whole book creates an impression with its strict and consistent arrangement and vast information, which undoubtedly are of great importance for an audience unfamiliar with Slavic studies.

As we have already mentioned, the separation of sources by chapter is performed on the basis of the language in which the respective manuscript has been written. Therefore, the responses of Pope Nicholas I (858–867) to the Bulgarian prince Boris I (died 907), the Chronicle of Jan Długosz (1415–1480), *Chronica Bohemorum* of Cosmas of Prague (1045–1125), and in general all texts written in Latin, regardless of the information they contain about any particular Slavic people, are included in the same chapter. The authors of the anthology have made an effort to distinguish between the East Slavic, West Slavic and South Slavic texts. However, it is not clear what were the criteria used to divide the Slavic sources into groups: the place of occurrence of the respective work, the origin of the manuscript, from which it is translated into Spanish, or the group of Slavs the information contained therein refers to. It is clear that it is not mandatory for the three listed criteria to match. For example, the words of John Chrysostom on the drought and God's punishments are indicated as a source for the religion of the Eastern Slavs, despite the fact that "Sources of Research on the Pre-Christian Religion of the Slavs" has accepted that the *Zlatostruy* is a collection created on the initiative of the Bulgarian King Simeon.

---

<sup>2</sup> П о п р у ж е н к о, М. Козма Пресвитер, болгарский писатель X века (=Български старини, 12). София, 1936.



ning back several decades. Furthermore, thanks to this methodology, already back in the 1960's and 1970's, V. V. Ivanov and V. N. Toporov, reconstructed Proto-Slavic mythology<sup>6</sup>. The authors base their work on etymological analyses of certain words and on comparison of folklore texts in various Slavic and Baltic languages. Even something more – in a joint work of V. V. Ivanov and T. Gamkrelidze dating back to 1984<sup>7</sup>, available online both in Russian and in English, on the basis of Indo-European language material it is shown how linguistic data provide an opportunity to draw conclusions about extra-linguistic facts: thus through formal semantic analysis of the vocabulary of dialects of the Indo-European proto-language, a reconstruction is effected of the world of the bearers of that language: fauna, flora, geographic location, climate, the presence and movement of humans in the world, their culture – interpreted in a wide scope of meanings – both material and spiritual (including religious beliefs, rituals, etc.)<sup>8</sup>. In fact Bulgarian linguistics does not avoid these approaches as well – Iv. Dobrev has brilliantly proven that the Proto-Slavic *-es-*, *-r-* and *-u-* stems are a language fact

---

<sup>6</sup> И в а н о в, В. В., В. Н. Т о п о р о в. Славянские языковые моделирующие семиотические системы. Москва, 1965; И в а н о в, В. В., В. Н. Т о п о р о в. Исследования в области славянских древностей: Лексические и фразеологические вопросы реконструкции текстов. Москва, 1974.

<sup>7</sup> Г а м к р е л и д з е, Т., В. В. И в а н о в. Индоевропейский язык и индоевропейцы. Реконструкции и историко-типологический анализ праязыка и протокультуры. Т. 1–2. Тбилиси, 1984. With translation in English: G a m k r e l i d z e, T., V. I v a n o v. Indo-European and the Indo-Europeans: A reconstruction and historical analysis of a proto-language and a proto-culture. 2 vols. Berlin–New York, 1994–1995.

<sup>8</sup> Г а м к р е л и д з е, Т., В. В. И в а н о в. Индоевропейский язык..., с. 457.

with a very important cultural and historical meaning, which allows us to have a glimpse at the worldview of Proto-Slavic tribes (the shaman ideology and cosmogonic ideas)<sup>9</sup>. Analyses and reconstructions of ancient mythological systems similar to the aforementioned, in our opinion, are no less important than the written sources that have reached us, because they provide a much more complete idea about the religious beliefs of the Slavs. For the Spanish language audience it would most likely be interesting and useful to realize that such approaches exist, and that they have provided certain results, which are still valid. Therefore we consider that the book presented “Sources of Research on the Pre-Christian Religion of the Slavs“, which is indeed very informative and detailed, would only stand to gain if the authors had at least mentioned the role of language and comparative typological data for the adequate understanding of the religion and the worldview of the Proto-Slavic person.

Without any doubt, “Sources of Research on the Pre-Christian Religion of the Slavs” presents a pioneering work for Slavic studies in Spain. The authors of the book would have gained our respect even only for the fact that they have presented such specialized subject matter in the Spanish language for the first time. The fact that the work has been written in a way that makes it accessible to a large number of scholars, including to people who are not familiar with the achievements of Slavic studies, is of paramount importance. Consequently, I have no doubt that the anthology will be of great importance for the development of Slavic studies in Spain, and will promote interest in Slavic studies in Europe.

*Gergana Ganeva,  
Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridsky”*

---

<sup>9</sup> Д о б р е в, Ив. Произход и значение на праславянското консонантно и дифтонгично склонение. София, 1982, с. 6.