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REVIEW:

Paul Srodecki

Antemurale Christianitatis. Zur Genese der Bollwerksrhetoric im östlichen Mitteleuropa an der Schwelle vom Mittelalter zur Frühen Neuzeit. – Matthiesen Verlag, 2015. – 532 S.

The dissertation-based monograph by Paul Srodecki suggests an impressive research of the *Antemurale* rhetoric, in particular the way it crystallized and functioned in Europe mostly from the 12th to the 17th century. The Author explores rhetorical clichés and strategies to demonstrate how particular concepts shaped and transformed propagandistic discourse; which of them found the most welcoming reception and, thus, were transferred across borders; and which ones were the specific instruments and media of this transfer. In the Introduction, the Author points out that contemporary bulwark rhetoric, which is extensively used in political discourse to characterize both the extended European borders and current geopolitical conflicts in Europe, actually finds its origin in Middle Ages, when European unity presented itself in the form of *Respublica Christiana*¹. The particular virtue of the monograph is an extensive and complex use of the Eastern European sources (Czech, Polish, Hungarian), which still find limited attention in Western European and Northern American scholarship with focus on the propagandistic uses of the phenomenon of the “Other”. In this way, Paul Srodecki made his personal contribution into welcoming new members of the European Union after its enlargement in 2004, which is the point where he starts his narrative.

The monograph consists of 10 parts. In the introductory one, the Author sets his methodological background and explains his choice of sources. In terms of the wide geographical and chronological framework of the research, the Author’s decision to limit himself to the most widespread, and, thus, influential texts is quite logical. In the Chapter 2, the Author deals with the *Antemurale* concepts and the “Othering” strategies, connecting them to the Biblical and Antique textual heritage, as well

as their perception in a specifically Latin-Christian Medieval culture.

The Chapter 3 demonstrates how the papal intellectuals crafted the image of the Teutonic Order as “the shield of Christians” and “border guards” to establish ideological groundwork for the offensives of the Order, and specifically for the Drang nach Osten campaigns. Further on, the Author demonstrates how these rhetorical devices were appropriated in the medieval Poland and Hungary (p. 73–103). The next Chapter 4 is specifically interesting as Paul Srodecki reveals how the *Antemurale* topoi were employed by both the Order and the Kingdom of Poland against each other during their conflicts in the 15th century.

The Chapter 5 presents the humanist adaptation of the *Antemurale* rhetoric to the current urgent necessity of mobilizing the Christendom in order to withstand the challenge of advancing Ottoman forces, and the subsequent appropriation of this rhetoric in the Hungary of Mathias Corvinus and the Poland of the Jagiellons, namely the countries who literally found themselves at the unstable southern border (Chapter 6).

Chapter 7 offers a number of persuasive cases that allow the reader to assess the level of pragmatism of the Early-Modern political culture in the sense how successfully the *Antemurale* rhetoric was appropriated by the contemporary diplomacy, and how easily and eagerly it was leveled against the Ottoman “infidels” (Moldavian campaign of 1497, the Mohacs campaign of 1526), the Christian fellows (the first stages of the Italian wars (1494–1504)), and confessional Orthodox counterparts (Jagiellonian conflict with the Duchy of Moscow). At this point, the Author could have made a step further in defining multiple faces of pragmatism as applied to Moscow in the second half of the 15th century. Exactly at the moment when the Jagiellons struggled to create a real and imaginary border with the Muscovites, once again presenting themselves as the *Antemurale* defending the

¹ Paul Srodecki. *Antemurale Christianitatis. Zur Genese der Bollwerksrhetoric im östlichen Mitteleuropa an der Schwelle vom Mittelalter zur Frühen Neuzeit.* – Matthiesen Verlag, 2015. – S. 11–13.

Christendom against the outer barbarian world, the Pope contacted Moscow in the hope to secure a new member for the prospective Holy League and to symbolically benefit from the Riurikovič dynastic links to the Byzantine emperors². In the same chapter, Paul Srodecki also shows the deplorable consequences of the mentioned political pragmatism for the contemporary “European”, i.e. Latin Christian idea such as the crashed crusading intentions of the League of Cambrai. Addressing the end of the Mohacs catastrophe and the consequent considerable advance of the Ottoman Empire inward Europe, the Author points out the appropriation of the *Antemurale* rhetoric in Habsburg and Croatian diplomatic and literary practices³.

² Anna L. Khoroshkevič. *Rus' i Krym. Ot sojuza k protivostojaniu. Koniec 15 – nachalo 16 vv.* – Moscow: Editorial URSS, 2001. – P. 76–78.

³ The issue of the Croatian *Antemurale* rhetoric was also extensively addressed in the chapter 3 of the doctoral dissertation by Lovro Kunčević: *Kunčević L. The Myth of Ragusa: Discourses on Civil identity in an Adriatic City-State (ca. 1350–1600).* – Budapest: CEU, 2012.

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The rather brief Chapter 8 shows how the *Antemurale* rhetoric elaborated in the Renaissance Poland and Hungary had crossed the borders and got disseminated throughout Europe over the 16th–17th centuries, specifically during military conflicts with the Ottoman Empire.

In the concluding chapters 9–10, the Author goes beyond his chronological framework to find parallels and examples of the *Antemurale* rhetoric in the propagandistic strategies employed in the 19th, 20th, and occasionally even 21st centuries.

Overall, the methodologically accurate monograph by Paul Srodecki, which is based on an impressive range of sources collected in the archives all over Europe, is a solid contribution into the study of *Antemurale* rhetoric. Srodecki's substantial research of Medieval texts, his more sampled observations of the Early-Modern tendencies, and rather occasional examples from the Modern history allow to trace the way literary instruments have gradually found their place in real-life politics and started not only to reflect but also to occasionally shape its proceedings.

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