

## BORDERS AND THEIR MYTHS: BASTIONS OF FAITH AND NATION\* \*\*

Rev. of: Berezhnaya, L., Kein-Kircher, H. (Eds.). (2019). *Rampart Nations. Bulwark Myths of East European Multiconfessional Societies in the Age of Nationalism*. N. Y., Oxford, Berghahn Books. 406 + X p.

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The reviewer examines a recent anthology on the transformations of the *antemurale* myth in the borderlands of Eastern Europe during the age of nationalism. Edited by Lilya Berezhnaya and Heide Kein-Kircher, the volume contains thirteen essays by fourteen international authors. After briefly defining the *antemurale* myth, its most famous version (the *antemurale christianitatis*), and the ongoing relevance of the subject, the reviewer discusses the structure of the book and the content of the essays. Praise is offered to the wide number of cases analysed, the decision to open the collection with a contextual essay on the fifteenth-century history of the myth and to close it with discussions about the modern situation, the collective and individual strength of the essays, and the inclusion of numerous pieces discussing the material dimension of the myth and its spread (alongside more traditional evaluations of its discursive formulation). Criticism is largely directed at the peculiar structuring of Parts II and III, which produces a rather confused impression on the reader. On the whole, however, the book is heartily recommended, along with the hope that future scholarship will apply its approach to other geographical areas.

*Keywords:* *antemurale*, bastion, bulwark, multiconfessional, nationalism, Eastern Europe.

Автор анализирует недавно изданную антологию, посвященную трансформации *antemurale* («бастионного») мифа, который бытовал на пограничных территориях Восточной Европы в период национализма. Книга опубликована Лилией Бережной и Хайде Кайн-Кирхером. Труд содержит

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13 эссе, написанных 14 авторами. После краткого объяснения, чем является *antemurale* миф, в том числе в его наиболее распространенной концепции *antemurale christianitatis* (лат. «бастион христианства»), и комментария причин неугасаемой актуальности данной темы дается представление о содержании как данной работы в целом, так и ее отдельных эссе. В основном статьи оценены довольно высоко благодаря сюжетам, которые раскрываются в рецензируемых исследованиях. Кроме того, автор подчеркивает особую структуру данного издания, которая начинается с эссе о мифе и его появлении в XV в., а заканчивается дискуссией о современном состоянии изучения предмета, рассуждениями над слабыми и сильными сторонами каждого из эссе с привлечением дополнительного материала о создании мифа и его распространении (наряду с упоминанием более традиционного влияния дискурсивных формулировок). Критика в основном направлена на отдельные части (II и III), которые могут вызвать смешанные чувства у читателей. Тем не менее, автор рекомендует книгу с надеждой, что она окажется полезной будущим исследованиям, посвященным другим географическим регионам.

*Ключевые слова:* антемурал, бастион, оплот, многоконфессиональное общество, национализм, Восточная Европа.

Defined on its most basic level, the myth of the *antemurale* assigns a borderland the role of defender of a civilization against out-groups designated as not belonging to said civilization. It is hence both an inclusionary and exclusionary mechanism: inclusionary because the borderland is definitively assigned membership of the civilization it supposedly defends and exclusionary because it places some groups beyond the pale of that civilization. It can function as a rallying call on national and international levels. In terms of the borderland nation itself, the assignment of a special historical destiny, sometimes given the gloss of the sacred, can be used to summon citizens to fight. Internationally, other nations belonging to the in-group in need of defence might be expected to contribute to the battle. However, it can be as divisive as unifying: turned inwards, the myth can be used to identify and direct policies towards 'internal enemies', be they populations within the borderlands themselves or nations which are defined to have somehow 'lost' the attributes of the defended civilization. The *antemurale* myth is a discourse of identity and space given shape not only in text, but also in material objects (maps, paintings, and other artefacts) and particular geographical places (specific features, cities, and sites).

Perhaps the most famous example of the *antemurale* myth, the *antemurale christianitatis*, occurred in Renaissance Europe when Hungary was conceptualised as the bulwark of Catholic Christendom against the invading Islamic Ottoman Empire, partially in the hope of rallying the princes of Europe to launch crusades. Later, Venice and Poland also received and identified with this role. In terms of the latter, the myth was expanded to place Orthodox Muscovy firmly beyond the gates of Europe.

As we see here, European civilization was primarily defined in confessional terms: civilization was Catholic, non-civilization either Orthodox or Islamic. Hungary and Poland, the borderlands of Europe, had the holy duty of protecting this civilization from the external forces that would threaten it. In both countries, the myth proved enduringly popular, even as rising nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries intertwined with or subsumed earlier confessional forms of identity: as a consequence, the notion of civilizational bulwark became increasingly nationalised.

At the same time, the discourse was turned inwards as much as outwards. The conceptualisation of the *antemurale* depends on clear and clean border lines: here be we, there be dragons. However, the real situation in the region was an extremely complex array of linguistic, religious, and ethnic diversity. Thus, bulwark rhetoric was often directed at various minorities: in the case of Poland, Ukrainians and Jews were defined, confessionally, linguistically, and racially, as outsiders whose presence in the country was threatening on a civilizational level. This, of course, had disastrous consequences in the bloody decades of the twentieth century. The rise of the Soviet Union after 1917 gave the myth a distinctively anti-Bolshevik slant, casting many countries as a wall against an oncoming tide of atheism and collectivism: this often fused quite easily with existing anti-Semitic and russophobic tropes. The so-called 'Miracle on the Vistula' in 1920 gained pivotal status in this new Polish version of *antemurale* rhetoric, just as earlier Polish versions had heralded the siege of Vienna in 1683. Today, Polish and Hungarian governments continue to aim the myth at Middle Eastern refugees, post-Soviet Russia, internal opponents, EU institutions, and the 'decadent' countries of the West, casting themselves as protectors of a mythic 'true' Europe constituted by a loosely defined adherence to Christianity, traditional values, and certain racialized traits.

The thirteen authors (with fourteen chapters and an introduction) in Berezhnaya and Kein-Kircher's new anthology, launched as a result of collaborative research at the University of Münster and the Institute of the Leibniz Association in Marburg, seek to investigate the transformation of *antemurale* myths in the east European borderlands during the age of nationalism. The editors have included cases beyond the traditional ones of Poland and Hungary. Hence, several contributors examine Ukrainian and Russian versions of bulwark nationalism. One, Zaur Gasimov, also tackles a Turkish version propagated following the country's admission to NATO and thus the West's anti-Soviet blockade. Meanwhile, Jürgen Heyde and Ciprian Ghisa provide essays on the Jewish ghetto and Romanian Uniates in Transylvania, respectively. Ironically, the *antemurale* myth knows no borders, spreading transnationally to be used in a variety of different geographical contexts.

Although the essays mostly cover the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, the volume is bookended by parts I and IV, which offer pieces examining the pre-modern historical context and the situation following the collapse of the communist bloc. In the former, Kerstin Weiland examines the

propagation of the *antemurale* discourse through the speeches of Enea Silvio Piccolomini (the future Pope Pius II) at the Holy Roman diets of 1454–1455, where he demanded assistance for the Hungarian king against the Ottoman Empire. Although he did not invent this discourse, his mastery of rhetoric combined with Renaissance networks and new printing technology spread his words all over Europe: the result was his distinct imprint on many similar treatises written in the ensuing decades. Although Piccolomini's definition of Europe was primarily a religious one, he also cast it in terms of humanity and culture: the Turks were correspondingly described as monstrously cruel creatures with a hatred for learning and other achievements.

Part IV features works by Pål Kolstø and Paul Srodecki, who reflect on the endurance of bulwark rhetoric in modern Eastern Europe and beyond. These two essays demonstrate the timeliness and relevance of the current volume, since numerous parties across the continent are busy deploying versions of the *antemurale* myth in their quest for electoral and cultural dominance. They are joined by some political scientists, most famously Samuel Huntington, whose schema of modern civilizations and their conflicts remains highly dependent on the same religious definitions included in the original mythos [Huntington]. Kolstø also makes an effort to relate the emergence of *antemurale* myths to power asymmetries, i. e. such myths typically arise and are sustained in smaller, weaker countries in the face of larger, stronger neighbours. However, this seems to be somewhat at variance with other essays in the work, which demonstrate that quite powerful states, both historical and modern, also propagated bastion narratives. Perhaps it would be better to say that *perceived* power asymmetries had a role in the creation and perpetuation of these identities.

The other two parts focus on the sacralisation and nationalisation of the bulwark myth (Part II) and the means by which the myth was spread (Part III). So, for instance, in Part II we find Kerstin S. Jobst's essay on the variety of historical (semi-)myths employed to transform the Crimea into an Orthodox Russian space during the second half of the nineteenth century, while in Part III Philipp Hofeneder examines textbooks and the education system in the Habsburg province of Lvov to demonstrate how even small changes made during translation from Polish to Ukrainian helped turn school books into transmitters of a Ukrainian self-conception as a bulwark nation.

One area where a critique can be levelled at this volume is its organisation. On the one hand, the order of the essays might have better planned. Paul Srodecki's piece on Polish/Hungarian anti-Bolshevism and its roots in fact delves quite deep into the historical past of these *antemurale* myths, going back to their first occurrences in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This would make the essay a fitting continuation to Weiland's aforementioned chapter at the end of Part I, which concludes with a consideration of the dispersal of Piccolomini's bulwark conception to these eastern kingdoms. Equally, it would seem fitting to have placed Volodmyr Kravchenko's interrogation of why Ukrainian *antemurale* myths did not arise until the second half of the nineteenth century much earlier in the volume. However, Srodecki's work

does not appear until Chapter 11, Part III (while Kravchenko's is Chapter 8, Part III). Instead, the essay that opens Part II is Ghisa's on the Romanian Greek Catholic Church of Transylvania, which is an exception in terms of both subject and argument: this is the only piece to deal with Romanians and is the only one to conclude that an *antemurale* myth did not arise (instead, the Uniates insisted on their membership in a larger Catholic community). On the other hand, some of the chapters would have been better suited thematically to another section. Berezhnaya's research on Orthodox and Uniate monasteries as national bulwarks, currently in Part II, in many ways better fits Part III, given that her focus here is largely on the role of these religious institutions in the dispersal of *antemurale* myths through print media, pilgrimages, and frescos. The logic of the anthology's structure is thus rather hard to discern, making a rather muddled impression on the reader who tackles the volume as a whole rather than its individual essays.

These organisational gripes aside, the vast majority of these essays are worthy contributions. One highly positive aspect of the collection is that while this is a subject which inclines itself more towards discourse analysis, a number of the authors demonstrate that material objects, institutions, and places were just as important in the formulation and spread of bulwark concepts. Already mentioned are Berezhnaya's and Hofender's discussions of monasteries and schools: to this can be added Steven Seeler's investigation of mapping practices from the perspectives of famous German, Polish, and Ukrainian geographers, Heidi Hein-Kircher's consideration of travel guides of Lvov as presentations of the Polish bulwark, and Steven M. Norris' examination of Vasilii Vasnetsov's painting *Warriors (Bogatyri)* not only in terms of its execution and reception, but also in the very sensual response it evoked: Norris highlights how both imperial and Soviet audiences sometimes noted that they could smell whiffs of medieval Rus upon seeing a painting which deliberately evoked both the strength of Russia's defenders and its claims on the legacy of the Kievan state.

In general, this is a very strong assortment of essays from a well-chosen and varied team of international collaborators. Besides the rather confused and confusing structure, the other only flaw is that the editors might have intervened more strongly in one or two of the essays to get the authors to stick more closely to the volume theme. Otherwise, the book is an excellent and eloquent contribution to a topic that is only becoming more relevant both within historiography and the modern political context. The editors deserve praise not only for the commendable work in putting together this cooperative piece but also for the admirable introduction, which provides a thorough discussion of the available scholarly literature on the *antemurale* myth. They themselves recommend a further direction for future study when admitting to the presence of geographical caesuras in the book: examinations of bulwark nationalisms in the lands of Bohemia, the Balkans, and the Baltic will surely be based on insights derived from this volume.