



SHORT REVIEW

by Professor DSc. Ana Stoykova (Institute for Literature at BAS)
of the academic contributions presented by Assist. Prof. Dr. Evgeni Zashev
for participation in a competition for the academic position "associate professor", announced
at the Cyrillo-Methodian Research Center at BAS

As can be seen from the presented publications, the scholarly activities of Dr. Evgeni Zashev are in two main fields – the Old Bulgarian Patericon stories and the history of the Seven Saints' cult. His PhD thesis, developed under the guidance of the prominent paleoslavist Prof. Boryana Velcheva and defended in 2010, was also related to the problems of Patericon literature. In addition to Bulgarian philology, E. Zashev completed a MA degree in history and theory of culture at Sofia University and specialized in Byzantine literature and paleography in Greece as an Onassis Foundation Fellow. This multifaceted training, which expanded his in-depth knowledge of Old Bulgarian and Ancient Greek language and culture acquired at National School for Ancient Languages and Cultures, gave him the opportunity to work with Greek manuscripts and explore complex phenomena related to post-Byzantine multicultural societies in the 17th and 18th centuries in the Balkans. The publications presented for the competition, published in the last ten years, include one monograph, seven studies, one phototype edition of a manuscript with an introductory study and two editions of Byzantine literary texts in a New Bulgarian translation with commentary and notes. The monograph is Evgeni Zashev's habilitation thesis on the topic "The Berat Memory of St. Seven-Numbered Saints" (2024).

This book is the first attempt to comprehensively examine the appearance, establishment and initial spread of a Christian cult in the cities of present-day southwestern Albania in the pre-Revival age. We are talking about the gathering very specific cult of the Seven Saints, perceived in the Bulgarian public consciousness as an always existing part of the tradition of honoring the first Slavic teachers Cyril and Methodius and their disciples. However, the problem of its origin and establishing has not been fully clarified until now. The long lasting studies have linked its appearance to the Ohrid archdiocese and to the activities of the Moschopol printing house, where the Greek offices of the Seven Saints were published, but the conclusions reached so far are very general and a number of questions remained unexplained. That's why Evgeni Zashev's book, which aims to re-analyze all known texts and artifacts related to the Seven Saints, drawing on

new or insufficiently researched sources, is an important step forward in the study of "one of the most significant phenomena in the development of Cyril and Methodius traditions" (Grasheva 2003).

The book consists of an introduction, six chapters and an appendix, which contains texts that are the subject of analysis or are mentioned in the study. The chapters are arranged in a sequence following the order in which the cult of the Seven Saints arose and was formed, as Zashev believes. In the first chapter, he dwells on the Berat reliquary – the alleged repository of the relics of the two Cyril-Methodian disciples Gorazd and Angelarius, who, according to him, are the root cause of the origin of the studied cult. According to oral tradition, these relics were brought from Glavinitsa to Berat, and despite the fact that they could not be authentic, they became a local landmark and object of veneration.

Here, as well as later in the book, E. Zashev makes a very detailed and in-depth critical review of the research on the topic of the relics and the reliquary. He comes to the conclusion that the memory of the relics of Gorazd and Angelarius in Berat rests on two traditions – oral and written, and it can certainly be considered that they were brought to Berat before 1720, when the so-called Berat Office of the Seven Saints was printed. The second chapter of the book is dedicated to this office, which, according to Zashev, is the earliest monument testifying to the institutionalization of the cult of the Seven Saints. After a detailed codicological information about the edition of the Office, the author makes a detailed description of the text, paying attention to the second of the three interlaced canons in it, which is dedicated to Gorazd and Angelarius and is obviously an original work written especially for the most revered in the city saints. To Zashev's credit is the identification of the author of this canon, which has troubled previous researchers; he connects the monk Michael mentioned in the acrostic with the author of a number of paratexts published in Moskhopol editions, signed with the names Michail Ipischiot and Michail of Gora. Based on a note in the codicil of the Moskhopol monastery "St. John the Forerunner" Zashev not only proves that they are one and the same person – Michael Ipischiot, bishop of Gora and Mokra, but also gives information about him presenting him as a highly educated clergyman, author of numerous services and other works. The analysis of the numerous editions, which is accompanied by a critical reading of the previous studies, is extremely precise

and meticulously (in some places perhaps overly) detailed and leaves no doubt about the conclusions reached.

The third chapter of the work is also very interesting. In it, Zashev examines the "mechanisms of invention" of the cult of the Seven Saints and its characteristics. The analysis of the Berat Office shows that the celebrated saints are either listed or named (adjectively or with the collective noun) "Sedmochislenitsi". It is a curious fact established by the author that the hierarchy in the enumeration is broken in some cases in order to emphasize all seven saints equally. This chapter also examines the ethnic affiliation of the cult – first of all as Bulgarian, but also as Beratian, non-Bulgarian – as an expression of the local-patriotic idea.

The fourth and fifth chapters are dedicated to the oral and literary tradition and to the material evidence of the reverence for Gorazd and Angelarius in the lands of the Western Balkans, related to the transfer and storage of the relics, the primary basis of the cult of the Seven-Heavens. The reliquary and its silver fittings, the metal shoes and the two icons representing the ascension of Gorazd and Angelarius, as well as the previous studies on them, were analyzed critically and in great detail. A special place is dedicated to the Canon of Gorazd and Angelarius from the Berat Office and to the information in the work of Antim Alexoudis, who connects in a single narrative the activities of the Slavic educators, in the center of which Berat is located. The role of relics is very clearly presented in the summary of the "memory traces" chronology.

According to Zashev, they are probably based on an oral narrative, which, however, cannot be reconstructed. In the fifth chapter, the stages of the formation of the cult are again presented, here in a little more detail - mention, enumeration, differentiation. The first documented mention of the collective noun "Sedmochislenitsi" for the Slavic enlighteners and their disciples in the Life of John Vladimir has been extensively analyzed, and the relationship of the cult with this Bulgarian ruler and their common representation in the wall painting has also been traced. Both offices were examined – the Berat office and the Moskhopol office from 1742, in which there are the earliest evidences of the actual differentiation of the Seven Saints into a common cult. At the end of the fifth chapter is the actual conclusion of E. Zashev's work. Here he has placed a chronological table of the monuments examined, which not only presents a picture of the topography of the early spread of the cult of the Seven Saints, but also summarizes the evidence for this spread and for the process of its approval.

The two maps are very interesting, that illustrate the area of the places of memory preserved today. The reminder is important, that the entire written tradition is Greek-language, as well as the clear conclusion drawn, that it "cannot yet be recognized as a real Bulgarian national initiative of the revival type, but rather is a regional post-Byzantine cult that arose in the southwestern areal of the Ohrid archdiocese in a multi-ethnic environment with dominant cultural Hellenism" (pp. 172-173). At some subsequent stage, this cult moved to the northeast, passing into territories with a compact Bulgarian population and, proving to be in harmony with the renaissance rise of national awareness, which found expression in the national celebrations of Cyril and Methodius, was interpreted as all-Bulgarian, placing in its focus the creation of the Bulgarian script.

The sixth chapter of the work presents a more detailed analysis of the work of Antim Alexoudis, *A Brief Description of the Velegrad Metropolis*, presenting his personality, the Berat Diocese and the text itself, which contains information about the Seven Saints in three places.

An important part of Evgeni Zashev's book is the Appendix, where several texts are published. First of all, the text of the Berat office for the Seven Saints was published – a new, third edition, strictly following the old printed text and taking into account the corrections made in the previous editions. After it are placed *Dedication of Archbishop Joasaf of Ohrid* to the Office for St. Naum (Moskhopol, 1740) and another *Dedication of Archbishop Joasaf of Ohrid* from the Office for St. Kliment (Moskhopol, 1742). Finally, there is the edition of the work of Michail Ipischiot, ep. of Gora and Mokra, the compiler of the canon for Gorazd and Angelarius, *A brief history of the great famine and deprivation that occurred in 1740*.

At the end of the book is the list of cited literature, numbering over 150 titles in different languages, a significant part – in Greek and Albanian. Zashev's great bibliographic awareness, excellent knowledge of the publications used and their precise critical analysis should be emphasized.

The high value of E. Zashev's research is largely due to the fact that he introduces readers to hard-to-reach texts in Greek, extracted from manuscripts or old printed books, read, analyzed and presented in a New-Bulgarian translation. There is no doubt, that the work with them, which he handled brilliantly, requires a high level of mastery of the Greek literary language of the 17th–

18th centuries and specific knowledge and skills in the field of Greek paleography and archival studies. It must also be noted as a valuable quality of the work and that the author has everywhere applied illustrative photographic material, which allows one to immediately see the commented editions, images, artifacts. I have no doubt that procuring them has required enormous effort and has met with considerable difficulty, considering the objects involved.

E. Zashev's book is a contribution study of a high scholarly level, which will be used in all future studies of the early Cyril-Methodian tradition. The rich and precise language and the good style in which it is written are admirable, although in places the text is overloaded with details.

Among the publications of E. Zashev presented for the competition are some of his earlier studies on the cult of the Seven Saints, which are included in his habilitation work. Here I would like to draw attention to the two books with translations of Patericon stories, accompanied by highly professionally prepared comments and notes. Both of them contain an introductory study, dealing with issues related to the history of the readings as part of the medieval Patericon collections, some of which are also present in the Old Bulgarian translated literature. We are talking about "Stories about miracles, robbers, harlots and other narratives" (2014) and "Stories useful for the soul by Pavel – bishop of the God-protected Monemvasia" (2018), which introduce Bulgarian readers to a little-known side of medieval literature – the purpose not only to teach, but also to excite and entertain. The books are part of the "Legend Library" series, created by E. Zashev, in which eight volumes with varied content have already been published and which enjoys great interest.

Observing the requirements of Art. 22 of the Law on the Development of the Scientific Staff, I would like to point out that the scholarly and publication activity of Dr. Evgeni Zashev meets the minimum national requirements and the requirements reflected in the Regulations for the conditions and procedures for acquiring scientific degrees and holding scientific positions of the Cyril and Methodius Research Center. I also confirm that the publications submitted for the competition represent original scholarly developments and do not contain plagiarism.

Considering the contributing nature of Dr. Evgeni Zashev's publications, his high qualifications, his considerable professional skills and diligent and consistent work, I believe that

he is a researcher with proven professionalism who would be a valuable collaborator for any scholarly institution. That is why I strongly recommend to the esteemed Scientific Jury that he be elected as a docent in professional direction 2.2. History and Archaeology at the Cyril and Methodius Scientific Center at the BAS.

27.05.2024