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‘PRIMARILY A HISTORICAL STUDY’, OR HOW THE CONTEXT CHANGES CULTURAL STUDIES

Brogi, G., Yaremenko, M., Kuzyk, T., Kuczyńska, M., Niedźwiedź, J. (Eds). (2025). *Stefan Javors’kyj’s Sermons: 1691-1698*. Leiden: Brill.

Niedźwiedź, J., Awianowicz, B. (Eds). (2025). *Stefan Javors’kyj’s Panegyrics: 1684–1691*. Leiden: Brill.

Stefan Javors’kyj¹ is one of the unique writers and scholars who neatly embodies the complicated intellectual nature of a Central and Eastern European milieu. A new edition of his works, prepared by a multinational group of researchers (from Polish, Ukrainian, and Italian universities), presents us the intriguing crossroads of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Rus, the Hetmanate and Muscovite Tsardom literary traditions.

Two volumes with Javors’kyj’s works [Brogi et al. 2025; Niedźwiedź & Awianowicz 2025] contain editions of his poetry and prose with introductions, editorial comments, bibliographies and indexes. Special chapters regarding the nature of the volume were also included. In the *Panegyrics* edition, two editors wrote the *Commentaries* section, summarizing Polish poems and encapsulating the nuances, topoi, and references embedded in Javors’kyj’s work. Similarly, in the *Sermons* volume, the editors included their own commentary section corresponding to the characteristics of sermons. The content is organized and written in accordance with Brill’s standards, given that both volumes (numbers 69 and 70) belong to the series *Studies in Slavic Literature and Poetics*, which primarily focuses on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Slavic literature. Both volumes have a few photos of manuscripts and prints.

Worth mentioning is the fact that the research team also published a few articles as part of a research project [e.g. Awianowicz 2020; Brogi 2021; Niedźwiedź 2024], all of which provide a more thorough insight into the details of Javors’kyj’s works.

Stefan Javors’kyj was a bishop, scholar, and writer whose religious and literary career spanned several decades, several countries, and several languages². Born in 1658, the fu-

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¹ Authors use this version of his surname, which I also follow in this review. The bibliography, however, reflects several other English variants (e.g., Iavorsky, Iavorskii, Yavorsky), as well as the form *Jaworski* which is extensively used in Polish studies.

² A brief, thoroughly prepared biography of Javors’kyj was included in one of the articles written as part of a research project [Awianowicz 2020: 246-248]. The introductory chapters of both volumes pro-

ture bishop studied at Mohyla College in Kyiv, then enrolled in Jesuit colleges in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. He also studied at Vilnius University. After these voyages, Javors'kyj returned to Kyiv and began his career as a professor at his *alma mater*. After a visit to Moscow in 1700, he was appointed bishop of Ryazan by Peter I and soon became *locum tenens* of the see of Moscow. Javors'kyj died in 1722.

His literary work is a very interesting case in studies relating to Early Modern Central and Eastern Europe. Javors'kyj knew, used, and taught several languages. His poems and sermons – the main subject of the two volumes – were written in Latin, Polish, Church Slavonic, and partly in *prosta mova*. This alone highlights the complexity of editing his works.

The volume of *Sermons* was prepared by a team of nine researchers from three countries, each specializing in a slightly different field. An introduction written by Marzanna Kuczyńska shows the life and works of the future bishop, from his studies in Kyiv, to his time in the Commonwealth, and finally to his work and politics in Kyiv and Moscow. “Javors'kyj's sermons are one of the largest blank spots in scholarly terms” [Brogi et al. 2025: 15]³, writes Kuczyńska, explaining why these sermons should be edited. She also states that “all his life he wrote poetry, but was at his best in utilitarian texts, sermons included” [ibid.: 13]. The subject of Javors'kyj's bibliophilia and book collection is also part of the introduction. (“Books were Javors'kyj's great passion” [ibid.: 13])⁴. The largest part of the introduction serves as background information for the edition. The author presents “Javors'kyj's accomplishments in the area of homiletics” [ibid.: 15] and shows the bishop's vision of a preacher and the preacher's role among the people. These introductory comments put a lot of emphasis on Javors'kyj's ability to combine Western European and Polish Baroque trends (learnt in Jesuit colleges) with the tradition of Ruthenian homiletics and Eastern theology [ibid.: 21-22]. A broad outline of philosophical and theological ideas is presented and discussed through citations from Javors'kyj's sermons.

The edition of sermons consists of 15 (out of 329 from the “Ukrainian period”!) “high literary” ones [ibid.: 16]. The chosen texts date back to the 1690s, a period when Javors'kyj was a professor in Kyiv, and represent a wide spectrum of feasts and occasions. Specifically, ten sermons from the edition focus on Orthodox feast days (e.g., the Dormition of the Mother of God, Easter), while five are devoted to the veneration of saints (e.g., St. Barbara or the Beheading of St. John the Baptist). All of them are “multi-layered texts” [ibid.: 363], meaning that they were prepared in one main language (like Church Slavonic) and surrounded by notes and glosses in other languages (Latin, Polish, even Greek: [ibid.: 361]). The critical apparatus and comments explain most of the problematic editorial issues, and the model of the edition shows various layers of texts and languages. Another section, titled *Commentaries to the Sermons*, addresses other, more complex problems.

Editorial Comments consist of a characterisation of the sources, i.e., four volumes comprising 3,594 pages of Javors'kyj's sermons preserved in a St. Petersburg archive [ibid.: 357-358]. The documents from the Ukrainian period are thoroughly described and compiled into a list detailing their titles (mostly in Latin), first-page dimensions, and autograph extent. Additionally, an *Editorial Choices* chapter outlines the rationale behind specific textual decisions.

vide more extensive biographical accounts [Brogi et al. 2025: 1-14; Niedzwiedz & Awianowicz 2025: 4-12].

³ This would probably still be partly the case, as Javors'kyj's autographs are stored in the St. Petersburg Russian State Archive.

⁴ Many of his books ended up in libraries in Kharkiv.

Commentaries to the Sermons part is especially interesting. The researchers describe and comment on every sermon in English, making an effort to show literary, philosophical, and historical traditions. Each of the 15 sermons is accompanied by a commentary; i.e. the scholar (G. Brogi) presents their positions in Javors'kyj's oeuvre and the time and place of their delivery. She also provides a quite sophisticated analysis in the form of an abstract with a broad interpretation, pointing out the application of the classical and Baroque rhetoric rules. *Thema, exempla*, and other subdivisions are pointed out. The analysis is thorough and broadly refers to Bible verses or other works by Javors'kyj (including some from the volume of panegyrics). From time to time, the scholar even identifies other potential sources of inspiration in constructing parts and images of the sermon, like *Pia desideria* by Herman Hugo [ibid.: 388-390].

Sermons are great material to show the multilingual mind of Javors'kyj. A mix and medley of Polish, Latin, Ukrainian, and Church Slavonic words, examples, structures, and images presents a whole spectrum of the bishop's knowledge and skill. Latin titles and *exempla* are taken from Western sources or a *paterikon*, yet at the same time we can see the special role of Aristotle and thinkers and theologians of the Byzantine tradition like John Chrysostomos as *auctores*. Javors'kyj's work is commented on by the researcher:

Beside the rhythmic compositional structure, linguistic and stylistic choices contribute to bolstering the expressive power of the text. The author smoothly integrates quotations from liturgical hymns and biblical references in Church Slavonic with Middle Ukrainian language, mainly used to describe the sequence of seasons, the natural world, and the human condition. The strikingly intense visual images, together with a skilful use of language and style, are blended together within the literary texture of the work and charge words with emotional significance. [Brogi et al. 2025: 406]

The volume ends with a bibliography and an index with variant spellings of names, titles, and geographical names provided in both scripts (Latin and Cyrillic).

The second volume – a commented edition of panegyrics – is similar in structure and differs only in the sections dealing with genre-specific issues (i.e., sermons were handwritten autographs; panegyrics were printed). It also has a glossary explaining less common words and names.

The introductory part provides insight into the history of countries and peoples living in Central and Eastern Europe. It is shown how complicated the nature of 17th-century Ukrainian culture was – politically caught between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the rising Russian Tsardom, and Ruthenian attempts to organize an independent state. The history of this region – contemporary areas of states extending from Lithuania through Belarus and Poland to Ukraine – is far more complex than it is sometimes thought (especially in Western Europe), and in the 17th century it was even more complex with regard to rulers, languages, and cultural traditions:

In this vast multi-ethnic, multireligious, and multilingual state, Latin culture was dominant, a fact which also influenced the Orthodox-Ruthenian inhabitants of the eastern parts of the country [Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – *T. K.*]. As a consequence, in the 16th and 17th centuries the Ukrainian lands – although still mainly Orthodox – became an integral part of Latin-based Europe and contributed to the development of its literature. [Niedźwiedź, Awianowicz 2025: 2]

A special role was played by Kyiv-Mohyla College and its circle of scholars, poets, teachers, and monks. One of these figures was Stefan Javors'kyj.

After a brief biography (written in a slightly different style than a similar fragment in the sermons volume), Jakub Niedźwiedź (author of the introduction) presents Javors'kyj's

literary output, mentioning poems, sermons, letters, treatises, manuals, and other works. A significant part of the introduction is a panorama of panegyrics in eastern areas of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth since the first decades of the 17th century, which inspired Javors'kyj's writings. Niedźwiedź presents the theory and history of the "new panegyric", which combines different genres and arts (like graphic art) and is "always built upon one central conceit (*conceptum*)" [Niedźwiedź, Awianowicz 2025: 19]. Its "rich and elaborated shape" [ibid.: 20] required considerable attention in order to read and understand the nuances of the work.

The authors of the edition chose four panegyrics: *Hercules post Atlantem* (1684), *Echo głosu wołającego na puszczy* (*Echo of the Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness*, 1689), *Arctos caeli Rossiaci* (1690) and *Pełnia nieubywającej chwały* (*The Fullness of Never Decreasing Glory*, 1691); most of them were written partly in Latin and partly in Polish. Each of the four panegyrics is contextualized in the introductions and subsequently undergoes a meticulous textual edition and analysis in the editorial section.

The edition of the panegyrics includes notes clarifying difficult or tricky parts. More extensive comments, interpretations, and paraphrases are included in the part called *Commentaries to the Panegyrics*. Detailed information about the copies from several libraries used in preparing the volume is listed in the editorial comments. The editors add notes indicating whether a particular copy is or is not complete. The editorial choices chapter is of course also included. It is worth mentioning that this edition required separate decisions for parts written in Latin and Polish.

Commentaries – as in the sermons edition – constitute a mixture of an English paraphrase and an analytical overview (e.g. pointing out literary *topoi*, explaining an obscure name or title). This volume ends with a *Glossary of Toponyms, Mythological, Biblical, and Historical Names* and a *Glossary of Old Polish Words*. Both are highly valuable, as the panegyric is a genre replete with elaborate names and complex constructions that may pose a challenge even for seasoned scholars.

The edition of Javors'kyj's works presents the culture of 17th-century Rus as a borderland territory that combined Western and Eastern European trends and patterns – multi-layered in terms of ideas and multilingual in literary constructs. A broad international team of researchers and an English-language commented edition should hopefully secure this poet, teacher, and preacher a well-deserved place among European late Baroque authors.

Currently, the scholars who created these two volumes are working on a third volume, which will present studies of Javors'kyj's poetry and other works. Editions of other sermons are also planned. Collectively, these future publications promise to provide an even broader picture of Stefan Javors'kyj's literary output, establishing this initiative as a remarkable and impressive project that secures his place in European cultural history.

Lastly – an elephant in the room – the editors do not keep silent about the political situation, nor should we. From the outset, this historical project has had a political dimension. As the authors note in a short preface to the panegyrics edition:

The war also changed the context of our research. What was supposed to be primarily a historical study became a voice in a very contemporary debate about the relationship between Russia and Ukraine. [...] The results of our research refute the false claims of contemporary Russian propaganda that the Ukrainian nation and culture are supposedly derived from Russian culture. In the case of Stefan Javors'kyj, the opposite is true.

[Niedźwiedź, Awianowicz 2025: VII-VIII]

This is a striking reminder of how the tables are sometimes turned.

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«На початках історичне дослідження», або як контекст змінює культурні дослідження

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