

## Spór o mesjanizm

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Andrzej Wawrzynowicz's collection *Spór o mesjanizm* is a three-volume publication devoted to the subject of Polish messianic thought. The books were published in the series *Klasyki Polskiej Nowoczesności (Classics of Polish Modernism)* by Fundacja Augusta Hrabiego Cieszkowskiego and they are a valuable contribution to Polish intellectual history.

In the first volume Wawrzynowicz introduces the subject of messianism and the most significant writers who developed messianic ideas in their works. The book consists of a wide range of primary sources, with very little commentary. The texts presented here were written over a period of more than 140 years: the earliest one dates back to 1800-1801 and was published in 1818, while the last one dates from 1939. The book is divided into three parts, each presenting works associated with a different phase of the intellectual development of the messianic idea: pre-messianism (part one), proper messianism (part two) and neo-messianism (part three). As the author argues in the introductory essay, the purpose of this volume is to "provide the reader with primary sources allowing a broad insight into the complex issue of history of Polish messianism" (p. v). Indeed, the broad scope of the collection challenges the most common interpretation of messianic thought as being limited to the romanticist period of Polish literature and philosophy.

The first part of the book presents texts created in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, before the creation of *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* by Adam Mickiewicz (widely considered as the core messianic text). From Jan Paweł Woronicz's classical poems written in the typically eighteenth century fashion to excerpts from Maurycy Mochnacki's *Powstanie narodu polskiego w roku 1830 i 1831*, this section offers the most significant ideological, philosophical and historical approaches to the subject of messianism created in its early phase. Wawrzynowicz decided also to include here Józef Maria Hoene-Wroński's *Prodrom mesjanizmu albo filozofii absolutnej*. The majority of Hoene-Wroński's works, written in French, were rediscovered only after his death in 1853 and the first translation of *Prodrom* into Polish was published in 1921. However, his works were not completely unknown to the nineteenth century intellectuals and we can find many references to Hoene-Wroński's works in other sources presented in this collection.

Several authors of the pre-messianic and messianic period stressed the significance of Polish nation in the history of Europe. Among them was Maurycy Mochnacki, who, in the introduction to his *Powstanie narodu polskiego*, argued that despite its political death, which followed the partitions of Poland and the defeat of the recent uprising, only the restitution of independent Poland would restore the balance of power in Europe (p. 66). This political angle was also visible in works written by Adam Mickiewicz. The Polish poet stressed the necessity

of another European war as a prerequisite of the restoration of Polish independence and pointed at political, cultural and moral links between Poland and France (p. 94). Though undoubtedly the most recognised, Mickiewicz was neither the first, nor the only writer to express these sentiments. The strength of his works lay, however, in their poetical form and religious references.

Excerpts from Mickiewicz's works open the second part of the book, but he was only one of a couple of writers who linked Polish messianism with European politics. Juliusz Słowacki, for example, in his open letter to Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, complained about the Prince's determination to restore independent Poland as a constitutional monarchy, while "the Spirit of the Nation" demanded much more than that. However, besides very general references to the republican spirit and demands for further progress of national development, Słowacki was unable to provide any clear or practical solution of the contemporary situation (pp. 164-165). Indeed, the lack of political experience and ability to offer any concrete answer to the contemporary questions appears to be the common element of all messianic writing before and after 1830. Even in Mickiewicz's *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* there is rather a wishful thinking than any practical idea regarding the restoration of an independent Poland.

Just like Mickiewicz and other romanticist authors, there were even in the late part of the nineteenth century authors who believed in the particular role that Poland, as a nation, had to play in the history of Europe. Writers such as Stanisław Szczepankowski worked hard on linking Polish romanticist thought with positivist ideas. They accepted some ideas put forward by Mickiewicz and other romantics, rejected others and supplemented those thoughts with their own ideas – particularly the need for education, better understanding of history and morality and adherence to messianic (i.e. Christian) principles in daily life. As Szczepankowski concludes, if Poland is to be restored, the Poles need to overcome the social divisions and unite as one nation of "equal and brave citizens". (p. 332)

There were also writers who looked beyond Poland and argued that introducing Christian teachings and values into wider European politics would bring beneficial results to the world. However, like Wojciech Dziędużycki in his *Mesjanizm polski a prawda dziejów*, they failed to suggest any direct actions which would bring that change. Jerzy Braun, who devoted a larger part of his literary career to promoting the works of Hoene-Wroński, went even further. Writing in 1938, he stressed the central role of Poland in maintaining the European balance of power. While the partitions of Poland in the late eighteenth century destroyed that balance, its eventual restoration after the First World War led to a new and beneficial situation on the continent. Braun's presentation of the interwar politics, particularly the inevitable conflict between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, serves as an excuse to stress the central and unique role played by Poland. Instead of suggesting alliance with either power, Braun believes that the third way is possible. According to him, Poland should use its moral authority in order to prevent a European war.

It is not possible to present the complexity of Polish messianic thought in a review and even the collection *Spór o mesjanizm* offers the reader only a glimpse of it. There can be no doubt that the selection of works

presented by Wawrzynowicz is only the tip of the iceberg. Shorter and longer excerpts from works of a variety of Polish writers may serve the readers as a reference point and encourage them to look for fuller versions or other sources by the same authors. There can be no doubt that the works of twenty-eight authors published in this volume present a highly comprehensive representation of the nineteenth and twentieth century writings related to Polish messianism. Wawrzynowicz does not favour widely recognised authors such as Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Cieszkowski or Wojtyła, presenting works by a number of lesser known writers, too. This broad scope of the collection makes it a significant source for the historians of the long nineteenth century. Finally, the decision to include texts written in the interwar period illustrates the longevity of the messianic thought well beyond the nineteenth century.