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Opinion

on the procedure for the academic position of Associate Professor

in professional field 2. Humanities: 2.1. Philology, at the Institute of Balkan Studies

with Center for Thracology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,

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The only candidate for the position of Associate Professor announced at the Institute of Balkan Studies with Center for Thracology, BAS is Assistant Prof. Ekaterina Pancheva Dikova, PhD.

Ekaterina Dikova and her recent research activities are well known to the Palaeoslavic community in Bulgaria and abroad. Already with the defense of her doctoral dissertation "The Phrasis in the Vitae and Eulogies by St Euthymius the Patriarch of Tărnovo" (2007), subsequently published as a book in two volumes (Vol. 1. Study; Vol. 2. Appendices. Sofia, 2011), she established herself as one of the few specialists in medieval Slavic literature in Bulgaria whose interests are permanently fixed on the problems of stylistics and rhetoric. She has been a lecturer in lexicology and historical grammar of the Bulgarian language, and since 2018 she has worked at the Institute of Balkan Studies with Center for Thracology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Her high professional qualification is shaped by her specializations in Mediaeval Studies and in translation at several European universities – at the Central European University in Budapest (where she defended a MA in Mediaeval Studies) and at the universities of Saarbrücken, Warwick, Vienna and Pisa. She also participated in international projects and scholarly fora. E. Dikova has a good written and spoken command of English, German, Russian, Italian, and Greek (these are practically all languages important for her main research fields – Palaeoslavic and Byzantine studies). Thus, she has a clear overview of worldwide developments in these fields of studies and the opportunity to develop a modern approach to her chosen topics.

In the competition for the position of Associate Professor Ekaterina Dikova presents 15 articles published in Bulgarian and foreign periodicals and thematic miscellanies (8 of them are in English) and one monograph entitled "Rhythm and Narration: Christopher of Mytilene' Calendar Distichs and Their South-Slavonic Translations" (2023). Her research focuses on mediaeval South Slavic literature (both translated and original) and covers several different areas of investigations clearly systematized in the outline of candidate's contributions, namely, studies on the transmission of rhythm and the application of Byzantine rhythmic patterns in translated poetic and non-poetic writings; poetics and rhetoric; historical lexicology and etymology. Written in concise and elegant style and terminologically sound, Dikova's publications are distinguished by a thorough linguistic analysis of the target texts, a careful comparison with the Greek sources, but also by an interdisciplinary approach and placing of the studied problem in a broad historical and cultural context. Indicative in this respect is the study of a seemingly small but curious detail, such as the penetration in the 14th century of the direct Greek borrowing мнмъ (mime), apparently little known to Slavic copyists and not attested in the lexicographical reference books.

It directed E. Dikova to the study and differentiate theatrical terms corresponding to the Greek word μῖμος as preserved in South Slavic medieval written sources and to outline their usual negative connotation during this period. Her conclusions about the use of the rare lexeme ѧѧ(ъ)ѥѳтѧ in the *Uchitel'noe Evangelie* (Didactic Gospel) by Constantine of Preslav and about the origin of words with the root *луд-* (mad-) in the Balkan Slavic languages are valuable contributions in the field of lexicology as well. There is no doubt, however, that her main achievements, her "reserved area", are the mechanisms for conveying and "translating" the rhythm and stylistic devices of medieval texts, as well as delineating the ways in which they affect listeners/readers (sensually, mnemonically, provoking associations, delivering aesthetic and intellectual pleasure). Numerous problems of rhythm have been raised by E. Dikova on the basis of original and translated writings in prose or verse belonging to different genres – the "Alphabetic Prayer" by Constantine of Preslav, the "The Sermon on the Transfiguration of Christ" (CPG 3939) attributed to Ephrem the Syrian, the synaxarial verses by the eleventh-century Byzantine poet and erudite Christopher of Mytilene (his synaxarial verses are the subject of 5 articles, as well as the book "Rhythm and Narration...", which elaborates and summarizes Dikova's earlier findings in this field).

The monograph "Rhythm and Narration..." is a multifaceted comparative study of Christopher of Mytilene's calendar verses dedicated to Christian feasts and saints, later appended to the Greek Verse Synaxarion for the summer half-year, and of their two parallel 14th-century South Slavonic translations within this ecclesiastical book. Dikova bases her observations on all available editions of the Greek text and on primary South Slavonic sources - six of the earliest manuscripts containing the Bulgarian translation of the Verse Prologue and the three extant copies with its Serbian translation. From the vast number of distichs included in them, she randomly drew a 10% representative sample – 91 distichs attested in all three traditions – which she analyzed from different perspectives, taking the findings to be indicative of the overall text.

There is no doubt that E. Dikova's topic and the task to find a relevant approach to it are a serious challenge that not every researcher of the mediaeval written heritage would take.

Firstly, because the rhythmic peculiarities of both the Greek synaxarial verses and their Slavonic translations have not been studied so far, and little has been said about the stylistic techniques used in them. Thus, the study of these problems gave E. Dikova almost unique scholarly expertise, but it also made her work particularly difficult. Thoroughly, critically, and analytically, she systematizes in her book what is known about the characteristics of the Byzantine iamb and the Byzantine epigram and concludes that Christopher of Mytilene's synaxarial distichs follow unconditionally their requirements as to metrics, form, and content. At the same time, she gives convincing arguments that epigrams about saints should be distinguished as a separate type in the existing classification of Byzantine epigrams (Part I. *Main features of the source text*).

Secondly, Dikova asks several very important and complex questions (Part II. *Form, meter, rhythm*) – to what extent Bulgarian and Serbian scribes (who had no knowledge of ancient and Byzantine theoretical treatises on metrics and rhetoric) have regarded synaxarial verses as poetic texts and to what extent the two translations adhere to the features of the Greek source (dodecasyllabic rhythm, distribution of caesurae and accents, rhyme-like endings, the order of

the words, etc.). Using the statistical method, she draws important conclusions about the desire of both translations to be faithful to both the content and the poetic features of their original, the fact that they always preserve the distichs and try to keep some of the rhetorical characteristics determining the rhythm (alliterations, parallel structures, rhetorical figures, etc.), albeit shifting their places within the distich. Some of the conclusions are rather cautious – and quite justifiably so - for objective reasons (e.g. the obscure location of the South Slavic accent in the 14th century) or when considering statistical values close to 50%. The 'chain principle' first formulated by Dikova, that is the linking of consecutive verses by rhythmic and rhetorical connections - needs, in my opinion, further evidence, especially as far as translations are concerned.

Thirdly, in many cases Christopher of Mytilene's synaxarial verses sound strange or even completely incomprehensible to the modern scholar, alien to their context and subtext, and perhaps so they were to some of their medieval listeners/readers. This is largely due to the Byzantine poet's effort to create a "compressed narrative", to use Dikova's term, i.e. to insert a complex narrative and theological sense into very short text, which is supposed to be "decompressed" in the mind of the perceiver. The basic mechanism exploited by Christopher of Mytilene in order to compress the story is the attributing of more than one meaning to individual words marked through repetition (mostly adnomination), as well as the use them as symbols, metaphors, references to biblical and ancient subjects, etc. This mechanism is very well elucidated by E. Dykova (Part III. *Compressed Narrative*). For me personally this is the best part of the monograph. Particularly interesting are Dikova's observations on the attempts of South Slavic scribes to find a way to express the untranslatable, on the notions that remained "lost in translation", on the replacement of realia from Antiquity and Byzantine cultural life with common Christian realia. I cannot but note the courage of E. Dikova to offer her personal interpretations of the verses quoted - both from the Greek originals and from the two translations (which not always coincide), and her skill and erudition in doing it. To elucidate their hidden meaning and to show their numerous semantic levels, she draws on sources ranging from ancient mythology, a treatise on gastronomy, and Lucian's works to hagiographic texts and the writings of the Church Fathers.

The edition appended to the book presents Christopher of Mytilene's calendar verses for the period from March through August in their fourteenth-century Bulgarian and Serbian translations (based entirely on primary sources and fitted with variant readings) together with a parallel Greek text extracted from and verified on several printed editions and two manuscripts. The Serbian translation is published here for the first time. The edition is undoubtedly a very good basis for future research in various fields – history of the Greek text, comparison of translation techniques, linguistic, literary, and theological studies.

I would like to emphasize that the scholarly publications submitted by Ekaterina Dikova meet and even exceed the requirements for the academic degree of Associate Professor.

I have not noticed any plagiarism in them.

Considering Ekaterina Dikova's serious scholarly achievements, her in-depth knowledge in the field of Palaeoslavic and Byzantine studies and in literary theory, as well as her precision in dealing with medieval texts, I confidently recommend to the esteemed members of the Examination Board that she be elected Associate Professor at the Institute of Balkan Studies with Center of Thracology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

14.02.2024

Sofia

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