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SHORT REVIEW

by Professor DSc. Ana Stoykova (Institute for Literature at BAS)

of the academic contributions presented by Assist. Prof. Dr. Ekaterina Dikova for participation in a competition for the academic position "associate professor", announced in the State Gazette, no. 87/17.10.2023, at the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Center for Tracology at BAS

As it can be seen from the presented publications, Dr. Ekaterina Dikova's scholarly activities are in two main areas – Old Bulgarian rhetoric, poetics and rhythmics and Old Bulgarian language with main emphasis on etymology and historical lexicology. Her doctoral dissertation, defended in the Specialized Council for Linguistics under the supervision of the prominent palaeoslavist Prof. Ivan Dobrev, is also related to this issue. In addition to Bulgarian philology at the University of Sofia, E. Dikova has completed a master's degree in medieval studies at the Central European University in Budapest and has specialized in a number of important research centers in Great Britain, Germany, Austria and Italy, and this qualification has broadened the direction of her research interests to problematic fields, related to Byzantine-Slavic literary connections. The publications submitted for the competition include two monographs, three studies and 12 articles, published mainly in the last 6-7 years, which present her as a talented, hardworking and competent researcher in specific areas such as the theoretical foundations of poetics and rhythms in works of Old Bulgarian original and translated literature, the adaptation of Byzantine literary paradigms in an Old Bulgarian environment, the technique of medieval translations from Greek, etc. One of the two monographs in the list of her publications is the edition of her dissertation on the phrase in the work of Patriarch Euthymius (2011), and the second is her habilitation thesis on the topic "Rhythm and Narration. The Calendar Distichs of Christopher of Mytilene and Their South Slavonic Translations" (2023).

This book is the first attempt to examine the poetic and rhythmic features of the two South Slavic translations (Bulgarian and Serbian) of the Verse Synaxar in comparison with their Greek original – the iambic calendar of the 11th century Byzantine poet Christopher of Mytilene. Although the verses in their Bulgarian (or Tărnovo) translation were published more than 20 years ago, until now there have been no attempts to analyze their literary characteristics, much less in such a broad literary-theoretical and cultural-historical context. The lack of great research interest is probably due to their perception not as an independent object of study, but only as part of the hagiographic works in the Prolog, but undoubtedly one

of the reasons is their specificity – the brevity and sometimes difficult to access meaning, as well as their significant number. Ekaterina Dikova not only takes on this difficult task, which requires specific professional training, but also performs it brilliantly. She undertakes the study of the two translations in comparison with their Byzantine original – the only possible scientific approach when working with translated works, devoting considerable space at the beginning of her work to the characteristic features of the Byzantine iambic dodecameter in order to be able to outline the parameters of the task, before which the two Slavic translators faced. Already in this first, introductory part, one can see that the author knows and uses a huge volume of scholarly literature written in various languages, and that she is well acquainted with theoretical treatises on rhetoric and metrics, both ancient, medieval and modern. Even here, her good command of Old Bulgarian and Byzantine Greek is evident, which further allows her to delve into the deepest nuances of the analyzed text. Another important feature of the research undertaken by E. Dikova is the precision with which she negotiates and uses scientific terminology, and in individual cases even offers her own terms, justifying her proposals with arguments.

The book contains a study consisting of an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion, and an edition of the two South Slavonic translations of the iambic distichs, extracted from selected manuscripts of the 14th and 15th centuries, presented alongside their Greek originals. In the first chapter, the author dwells on the main characteristics of the iambic calendar of Christopher Mytilene, created as a separate poetic work, and subsequently incorporated into the Synaxar. A careful look at the Greek text allowed E. Dikova to perceive a hitherto unnoticed feature of the calendar – the so-called from her "chain principle", which is expressed in the connection between consecutively arranged distichs. This connectedness, she points out, can be realized through repetition of the rhythmic, individual paronymous tokens, or even at the morpheme level. Next, the distinctive properties of the Byzantine epigram, the genre to which the calendrical iambic distichs of Christopher Mytilene are usually referred, are discussed, highlighting its differences with the ancient one. The differences between the Byzantine twelve-syllable and its ancient predecessor are also very interestingly presented. They are due to the changes imposed over time in the prosody, which is now mostly visual. Dikova easily traces the development of Greek verse composition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, confidently using the considerable scientific literature and mastered complex terminology. Concluding with a definition of Byzantine iambic dodecameter, she bases her study on the two 14th-century South Slavic translations of the

prologue verses, and in the next two chapters of her book she tries to establish whether the Slavic translators sought to recreate the formal and semantic features of the Greek original and how successfully they were able to do so.

The second chapter contains an innovative study of the rhythmic features of Christopher of Mytilene's Greek calendar distichs and their two Slavonic translations, which for the first time relies on statistical methods to reveal the extent to which the analyzed translated material conforms to the versification system of the Byzantine iambic dodecameter. The statistical approach allows obtaining convincing information about the character of the translated texts by presenting the percentage ratio of the rhythms stored in them, number of syllables, the place of the caesura, the pre-caesura stress, the clausula, visual prosody and other rhetorical rhythm determinants, related to the versification invariant proposed in the theoretical framework.

The third chapter, particularly valuable and interesting for me, is dedicated to the most characteristic content feature of the synaxar verses – the compressed narrative. Regardless of the fact that it was the subject of scientific research earlier, in E. Dikova's book, for the first time, an assumption is made that the main means of achieving maximum compression of the narrative is the use of keywords, in which, as she says, they "encapsulate" meanings remote from the particular words and even entire narratives. The main techniques are the play on words, the pun based on the meaning of personal names or on the use of paronymy, metaphorical associativity and intertextuality, vivid sensory imagery – and several of these techniques are often used simultaneously. The analysis of specific examples from the texts demonstrates how, in practice, the poetic skill of their Byzantine author allowed him to fit in 24 syllables information about the saint and his name, about his ministry and exploits, about his martyrdom for the faith. In addition to the sensory details that directly affect the perceivers, the author writes, other concepts require knowledge and intellectual effort to be fully perceived. This applies above all to the intertextual references, which, it turns out, are not only to St. Scripture, but very often refer to ancient myths and literary works of secular authors of various eras. The study of these references leads the researcher to the conclusion of the high level of secular and Christian education of both the author Hristofor Mytilenski and the audience for which he intended his work. Here is the place to note that in the depth of the semantic analyzes made, the remarkable awareness of the author of the study shines through, who points out parallels in publications of other scientists and looks for possible intertextual connections in ancient sources, in different versions of the biblical text, in the works of

church writers, saint's lives, theological treatises, even gastronomic works. Her observations on the way in which the ways of compressing the narrative are presented in the translations are very interesting – the translators do not always manage to convey the intertextual connections, sometimes they clearly do not perceive them, especially when they refer to ancient realities; the same applies to enigmaticity – the most difficult barrier to overcome in perceiving the compressed narrative, while sensory imagery is more often adequately conveyed.

The edition of the texts of the synaxar verses of the two South Slavonic translations is of great value in the work of E. Dikova. The verses are provided with different readings and accompanied by a parallel Greek text. For the first time, the Serbian translation of the distichs is published here, and the Bulgarian translation is presented with a new reading of the manuscript material. The edition conforms to the best editorial practices and will be a secure foundation for all future research on the prolog verses.

E. Dikova's book is a contributing and innovative study at a high scientific level, which will be used by specialists not only through its results, but also as a methodological model for future studies. The rich and precise language and the good style in which it is written are admirable, especially considering the complex problematics and the heavy terminological load of the text.

E. Dikova's habilitation thesis includes some of her earlier publications in this field, which are among the studies and articles presented for the competition. These are texts on various issues related to poetics and rhythmicity in general. It is noteworthy that her articles have been published in prestigious scholarly editions and most of them are in English. Among them, I would especially like to draw attention to her studies on the *Alphabet Prayer* of Konstantin of Preslav – an original Old Bulgarian poetic work from the end of the 9th century, written in twelve-syllable verses. According to the study, it appears that the Old Bulgarian poet strove to follow the Byzantine rhythmic pattern, following the alphabetic acrostic of Gregory the Theologian, and tried to achieve visual prosody in his work through the use of vowel pairs. An interesting different look at the same issue is her article on the *Homily on the Transfiguration*, attributed to St. Ephrem the Syrian, in which E. Dikova studies rhythmicity in a non-poetic text. Analyzing the two Slavonic translations of the homily against the Greek original, she concludes that the translations follow its rhythmic features and apply the same rhythmic figures found in it.

It is important to mention that in recent years E. Dikova has been a member of the scholarly teams in a number of projects of the Institute for Balkan Studies with a center of trachology, such as "The vocabulary of the Teacher's Gospel of Konstantin Preslavski: Old Bulgarian-Greek and Greek-Old Bulgarian dictionaries and indexes", several Bulgarian-Romanian projects dedicated to linguistic and cultural diversity in South-Eastern Europe, and the project for the Sofia University's Zograf' Digital Archive. Undoubtedly, the participation in these projects of such a well-prepared young researcher as E. Dikova contributed to their successful implementation, while also enriching her knowledge in new scientific areas and broadening her research horizons.

Complying with the requirements of Art. 22 of the Law on the Development of the Scientific Staff, I would like to point out that the scientific and publication activity of Dr. Ekaterina Dikova meets the minimum national requirements and the requirements reflected in the Regulations for the Application of the Law of the Institute of Balkan Studies with a Center for Tracology. I also confirm that the scientific publications submitted for the competition represent original scientific developments and do not contain plagiarism.

Considering the contributing nature of Dr. Ekaterina Dikova's publications, her high qualification, her considerable professional skills and her experience in the implementation of scientific projects, her thoroughness, her diligent and consistent work, I consider her to be a researcher with proven professionalism who would be a valuable collaborator for any scientific institution. That is why I strongly recommend to the esteemed Scientific Jury that she be elected as a docent in professional direction 2.1. Philology at the Institute of Balkan Studies with a center for trachology.

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