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# Short Review

by Professor Dr. Margaret Dimitrova
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for the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor
in the field 2.1. Philology (Byzantine-Slavonic literary contacts in the Middle Ages),
at Institute of Balkan Studies with Center of Thracology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,
(the position was announced in State Magazine no. 87 of October, 17, 2023)

I was included in the jury for the academic competition mentioned above with the order of the Director of the Institute of Balkan Studies with Center of Thracology, no. 131.1.RD-16/22/11/2023. The only candidate for the academic position announced is Dr. Ekaterina Dikova. Since her student years, I have known her as a person showing love for knowledge, targeting difficult and unexplored academic fields and posing new research questions. Also, I have observations on her further academic career, for instance, I participated in the pre-defense of her doctoral dissertation at the Department of Cyrillo-Methodian Studies, St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia. At this stage of her career, she impressed me not only with her profound knowledge of the history of medieval Bulgarian literature but also with her innovative approaches towards the classical works of St. Patriarch Euthymios and with the sound arguments defending her research conclusions. Dikova's book based on her doctoral dissertation is highly appreciated in our academic sphere: it is a fully innovative – in method and approach – study of the syntax and style of this famous medieval Bulgarian writer, and I am convinced that no further contributions on his works and more generally on medieval Slavonic rhetoric could be made without consulting Dikova's book.

The novelty of research questions and methodology is typical of the new book by the candidate in this competition, namely the book „Rhythm and Narration. The Calendar Distichs of Christopher of Mytilene and Their South Slavonic Translations" (Sofia: Institute of Balkan Studies with Center of Thracology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2023). The choice of this topic and approach is rooted in the sound knowledge of Dr. Dikova of Byzantine poetry and of the fourteenth-century translation literature amongst the South Slavs. The approach of the author is innovative: she concentrates on such rhythmic and poetic features both of the original (the dodecasyllabic distichs of Christopher of Mytilene on saints) and of the two translations (one executed in a Bulgarian and one in a Serbian milieux) that have not been addressed in scholarship until now, in particular, she discusses the difficulties that the translators met and the decision they took when rendering the sophisticated style of the religious Byzantine poetry containing specific tropes, etymological and enigmatic figures.

The chapter of the book (pp. 21-41) dealing with the poetic and stylistic specifics of the Greek text is a contribution both to Palaeoslavic and Byzantine studies since for the first time Christopher of Mytilene's rhythmic and poetic figures are analysed in detail viewed in the context

of Byzantine epigram and dodecassylabic poetry. This chapter shows that Dikova is well familiar with Byzantine scholarship but finds her own paths of research. In the following chapters, she uses the same plan of analysis: first, she outlines the peculiarities of the Greek text and further she juxtaposes the choices of the two translators working in South Slavonic milieux.

The second chapter of the book under review is dedicated to the complicated problematics of Byzantine metrics and its rendition in Slavonic translations. Dr. Dikova is well acquainted with the research on the original Old Bulgarian declamation poetry but she concentrates her efforts to the more complicated question of the translated Byzantine poetry. As an excellent continuation of the best Bulgarian scholarly traditions of using statistical methods in the study of early modern and modern Bulgarian literature by Miroslav Yanakiev and Maya Bayramova and bearing in mind the present-day progress in this field, Dikova statistically analyses the rhythmic structures of Christopher of Mytilene's distichs and their renditions in the two medieval South Slavonic translations, thus showing to what extent the translators used isosyllabism and caesura after the fifth or the seventh syllable as it was in the source text. What is worth mentioning here is that she realizes all the difficulties that a scholar meet and conventions that he/she should established when examining Slavonic manuscripts from this perspective because of the changes of the jers, and because of the competing norms in the use of the accent signs and because of the lack of detailed studies of supralinear signs in the fourteenth and fifteenth-century manuscripts.

I find especially valuable the chapter in Dikova's book entitled "Compressed narrative" (pp. 82-140), because it demonstrates how the translators coped with the sophisticated stylistic figures, intertextual links, sensory and enigmatic imagery in Christopher of Mytilene's calendar poetry dedicated to Christian saints and arranged according to the church calendar. This type of analysis is made for the first time in scholarship and deserves admiration because the researcher designed her own instrumentarium that most adequately describes and evaluates the translation techniques, priorities, and decisions of medieval Slavonic writers.

The concluding sections of the chapters and subchapters and of the book as a whole clearly articulate the results of the analyses made and follow from the argumentation of the author. No doubt, the parallel edition of the distichs, of Greek text and two translations, allows for verification of Dikova's conclusions and for further research. I would like to underline that the translation made in a Serbian milieu is edited for the first time in this book and that it includes variant readings; the other two texts are edited in a new design that is appropriate for the examination of rhythmic structures and stylistic figures.

Dr. Ekaterina Dikova's new book is a truly groundbreaking study carried on in a difficult but important academic area, a study for which she did not follow established models but chose her own paths of analyses and found a new angle from which to evaluate the translational mastery of medieval Slavic scribes, their sense of rhythm, literary figures and intertextual links. Moreover, an important point of her insights is that the rendering of ancient realia that appeared in the Byzantine text was subordinated to the medieval Christian mentality in the translations. This book opens a new perspective in palaeoslavistics for the study of translated literature, rhetoric and poetics.

In the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor, Dr. Dikova, along with her two monographs, has presented fifteen papers published in Bulgarian or English in reputable journals, thus her publication activity far exceeds the academic criteria for holding the academic position of associate professor. Here I would like to single out her paper on rhythm in the prosaic text of the "Homily on Transfiguration" ascribed to Ephraim the Syrian in which she argues that two medieval Slavonic translators caught rhetoric rhythmic structures and tried to render them. Although most of Dikova's research is on fourteenth-century South Slavonic literature, she has also contributed to the study of the rhythm in a seminal Old Bulgarian work, known as "Alphabet Prayer".

As a matter of fact, the research of the candidate is not limited to the field of rhythm and style of Byzantine and medieval South Slavonic literatures. She uses both classical and innovative methods of etymological and lexical analyses shedding light on cultural practices and mentality, see, for instance, her papers on the lexemes denoting hunger, or the papers on the etymology and history of the word "mimъ" and of the root "lud-".

When I was given the task of selecting articles by Bulgarian researchers with Byzantine and Paleoslavic topics to be translated into English and to be included in a book so that they would reach a wider academic audience, from the publications of young researchers I chose the studies by E. Dikova on πλοκή, because her research shed light on the Bulgarian-Byzantine cultural dialogue, on the reception and transformation of ancient figures in medieval literature, and especially on the style of "pletenie slovesь" [word weaving]. Dikova's paper included in the volume "Medieval Bulgarian Art and Letters in a Byzantine Context", demonstrates her sound knowledge both of Byzantine and fourteenth-century Bulgarian writing and of the role of Hesychasm, and further her capacity to find innovative approaches to important themes demonstrating the specifics of the Christian reception of antique rhetoric and stylistic heritage.

I have had the opportunity to listen to Dr. Dikova's presentations at national and international conferences at which they were very well received provoking interest and discussion. Furthermore, I have excellent personal impressions from Dr. Dikova's work as an editor of medieval texts, as a translator and editor of a volume with academic papers -- editions that she did not include in the documents submitted for this competition. In my judgement, she is an accomplished scholar in the field of Bulgarian-Greek cultural dialogue, in Palaeoslavic and Balkan Studies.

Having in mind the academic accomplishments of Dr. Dikova, marked with deep insights in medieval mentality and literary culture in the Balkans and with innovative approaches and methods, I – without any reservation – propose to the Academic Council of the Institute of Balkan Studies with Center of Thracology to elect Dr. Ekaterina Dikova on the position of Associate Professor in professional field 2.1. Philology (Byzantine-Slavonic literary contacts in the Middle Ages)

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Sofia