

Review

of Assoc. Professor, Dr.Sc. Yura Konstantinova

for the scientific production of Dr. Fotiny Yannis Christakoudy-Konstantinidou

in connection with her participation in the competition for the academic position of

“Associate Professor”

The competition for the open position of Associate Professor in the scientific field 2.1. Philology (Literature of the People of Europe, America, Asia, Africa and Australia – Modern Greek Literature) was announced for the needs of the Faculty of Slavic Studies, University of Sofia St. Kliment Ohridski in the State Gazette 21/13.03.2020. The only participant in the competition is the Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Fotiny Yannis Christakoudy-Konstantinidou who takes part in it with 2 monographs and 14 articles.

The monograph “Symbolism and Modern Greek Poetry from the End of the 19th and the Beginning of the 20th Century” is a revised version of the candidate’s doctoral dissertation on “The Modern Literary Movements and Greek Poetry (the First Decades of the 20th Century)”. As this work is essentially defended before a competent scientific jury, I will not consider it in this review. In it I will focus on the second monograph of Fotiny Christakoudy, “Issues of the 1880-1930 Greek Literary Development (Sketches on Modern Greek Poetry)”, which is an in-depth and interesting study of Greek reality during nearly half a century with an emphasis on Greek literary modernism. The aim of the author is to show not only the development of Greek poetry in the period 1880-1930, but also to analyze its connection with Greek identity.

To her literature is a reflection of the processes taking place in society, therefore the debate about the modern proves to be one of the centres of her study. In a remarkably discreet, yet confident manner, the author joins in the debate with her reflections and presents her vision of the dilemmas facing the modern individual, who has to cognize himself and find his mainstay in the past in order to move on and have a future. The monograph features the torments of the Greek, and in general the Balkan artist, who has to combine the national, the native, the traditional with the European, the alien, the modern. The author offers the interesting reasoning that not only the European literary processes influence the artists in the Balkans, but they themselves are also influenced by the Balkan artists. This gives reason to Dr. Christakoudy to talk about interpenetration and active dialogue in the field of European cultures and literatures. Her answer is that the peripheral areas of Europe remain part of the

whole, even though they differ from it, and their common features are by far more than their distinctions. (p. 243)

Regarding the “native-alien” debate, the parallels drawn by Fotiny Christakoudy between the literary pursuits of artists from Greece and Bulgaria make excellent impression. In fact, it is indeed the featuring of Modern Greek poetry both in the context of the socio-political processes and debates in Greece and in that of the intellectual, literary and artistic quests in the Balkans and in Europe that is one of the most remarkable achievements of the monograph. In this sense F. Christakoudy successfully achieves her goal and makes a comparative study of the multifaceted issues predetermined by the dialogue between Greek literature and European art while highlighting both the transformation of national models and the spiritual continuity filtering the external literary influences. There is every logic in her conclusion that “Greek literature is not ‘self-sufficient’” and that it deliberately seeks contact with “the alien”, but the latter’s adoption is not uncritical and “collides with the ability of the Balkan cultures to creatively adjust to the new without losing their identity”. (c. 46)

The structure of the monograph under review does not follow the chronological development of modernism in Greek poetry and does not necessarily seek to discuss each of the examined poets separately. The author has specified in a subtitle that she actually presents sketches on modern Greek poetry, which she has designed as a set of six chapters united structurally by an introduction and an epilogue. Nonetheless, the result is a comprehensive work, because the chapters address different aspects and present more and more new perspectives to the general issue as posed. In addition to the information about Greek modernist poets the reader finds in them data on Greek politicians, on military and social cataclysms, on disputes over the language problem in Greece, on the urban changes in Athens, on the modernization of mentality, etc. Although the chosen structure implies repetitions, the text ultimately manages to create not only knowledge but also understanding of Greek poetic modernism, and I would also say of the Greek and even Balkan mentality. It seems important for me to single out, from among the findings, the thesis that Greek modernism does not favour the individualistic philosophy and respectively does not disrupt the existing ties between the modern individual and his surroundings. That is exactly why, according to the author, it remains “profoundly Balkan”, always seeking and linked with the native. (p. 107-108)

Naturally, the monograph lacks no biographical references to the Greek modernist poets, literary analysis of their work, or translations of their poems, whereby Christakoudy justifies her views. This approach is particularly useful vis-à-vis the “cosmopolitan poets” less

familiar to the reader, whose advent came immediately after the end of the “pure symbolism” that gradually waned in the period 1915-1925. Along with that, at places the discussion is structured as a peculiar dialogue between author and reader, where the major issues addressed by the study are raised in the form of questions. The skill to ask the right questions, to formulate significant issues, to distinguish the important from the unimportant is key for the researcher, who seeks and tries to find answers. However, for the right answers to be found, one also needs thorough knowledge of the matter under examination. F. Christakoudy is not only perfectly informed about the works and biographies of the modernist poets, but she has also rationalized them comprehensively, which is also evident from her author’s translations of a part of the verses presented in the monograph. The in-depth insight into the examined issues allows Dr. Christakoudy to not only attract opinions on the part of competent connoisseurs of Greek literature, but also at times to challenge their theses in a well-grounded manner.

I would like to put special emphasis on the distinctions made between the different generations of Greek symbolists and neo-symbolists. Fotiny Christakoudy is confident and attentive to details as she guides the reader through the features characteristic of early Greek symbolism (immersion in the individual’s inner world, revealing psychological states via symbols, musicality, suggestiveness, etc.), so as to unveil to him the specifics of the symbolism of the Greek poets belonging to the generation of the 1920s (turning to the self and to the past, romantic attitudes, despair, melancholy, cosmopolitanism, lack of ideals, etc.) and to lead him up to the mature works of C. Cavafy and G. Seferis. Notwithstanding the distinctions made, the author draws the fully justified conclusion that one of the epochs (the 1890s) “is mirrored in the spiral of time” by the other one (the 1920s), “sparking similar poetic reflections”, as it turned out that the events which resulted in the advent of symbolism in Greece were repeated some thirty years later. (p. 178)

Finally, I would like to once again go back to one of the issues posed in the monograph – that of the identity crisis of the modern individual. It is central not only to the Greek modernist poets but also to humanity at large, which is why it has become the logical focus of the author’s attention. F. Christakoudy views the Greek poetry created at the break and in the early decades of the 20th century as carrier of historical memory and as a coordinate system for determining identity. She arrives at the conclusion that art has been called on to replace the “dead gods”, to be a moral alternative at the “end of civilization” and to fill the ethical vacuum of modernity. (p. 241) The reader’s journey through the poetic world guided by Dr. Christakoudy, ends up with the optimistic “bright” side of life, even though the

works of the symbolist poets reflect their deeply troubled inner life via the dark depth of symbols. However, Greek poets impart to the aesthetics of symbolism the colour shades of the entire light spectrum typical of the latitudes of the warm South. (p. 244)

The monograph “Issues of the 1880-1930 Greek Literary Development (Sketches on Modern Greek Poetry)” is an aesthetically sound, intellectually rich and very enjoyable reading. Fotiny Christakoudy’s profound love for poetry, which she believes makes the world better, more beautiful and more sublime transpires in it. At the same time, Fotini Christakoudy’s Sketches are essentially an in-depth scientific study in which there are numerous literary parallels, moreover, interesting opinions are drawn and original author’s comments are made. The excellent philological background, the diverse professional activities and the serious scholarly quests of the author contribute to these achievements.

F. Christakoudy majored in Balkan studies and English language and literature and completed a two-year course in international relations at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski. Subsequently she successfully defended her PhD thesis in literary theory at the Institute of Balkan Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, specialized at multiple European universities and is currently a lecturer in Modern Greek language and literature at Sofia University. Apart from the two monographs F. Christakoudy is the author of a number of research works in the area of comparative literary studies, the reception of symbolism in Modern Greek poetry, etc., as well as a translator of fiction from Greek language. Fotiny Christakoudy is not afraid to engage in literary translations from and into Greek, and this is a creative activity that requires much more than an excellent knowledge of the languages between which he translates.

Among the publications with which Dr. Christakoudy participates in the competition her articles related to Greek symbolism logically prevail. In this group are her texts “About some basic features of Greek symbolism” in the volume of papers “The Balkans: the multifaceted dimensions of European culture”; “On the specifics of Greek symbolism” in the volume of papers “Greece, Bulgaria, Europe. Cultural-historical connections in modern times”; “Formalistic markers of the ‘Modern’ in Greek poetry: a retrospective from the point of view of literary history” in *Colloquia Comparativa Litterarum*. Again, related to the great theme of modernism in Greek poetry are her analyses dedicated to some of the most famous (the Nobel laureate Odysseus Elytis) and the lesser known (Nikos Cavvadias - the poet of the sea) Greek poets of the twentieth century.

Fotiny Christakoudy’s interest in the various manifestations of the modernization in Greece is obvious. Her article “The problem of Greek diglossia - diachronic and synchronic

aspects” fits into the great theme of the development of the Greek language, its historical significance, its political uses and modernization significance. I would describe as bold the candidate’s attempt to look in a much broader sense for the different dimensions of modernity in Greece in her article “About some urban accents in the Greek cultural model of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century”, published in the volume of papers “The Southeast European city and the contemporaneity of the past”. In it, Dr. Christakoudy focuses not only on the changes in the urban landscape of the Greek capital, but also on the influence of modernism in sculpture, fine and applied arts; she highlights the struggle for state support in the field of culture and analyzes the penetration of national ideology in the field of art.

I would like to pay attention to another category of publications of Dr. Christakoudy - those related to the promotion of Bulgarian poetry in Greece. Her articles about Nikola Vaptsarov, Valeri Petrov and about the contemporary reception of Bulgarian poetry in Greece belong to this group. These texts acquaint the professional Greek community with the work of Bulgarian poets and contribute not only to the making of literary parallels, but also to a better understanding of the Bulgarian mentality by our southern neighbor. It seems to me that this is one of the most significant merits of the papers of Fotiny Christakoudy - the fact that they create bridges between the people and the nations. Thanks to her research, the Bulgarian and Greek readers learn a lot about the culture, history and life of their neighbors and also become able to see the common ground and explain the different in their perceptions. And this is extremely important for two neighboring nations, who have been separated by politics for centuries, but in the meantime are doomed to live together and need to learn more about each other. An interesting accent in the work of Fotiny Christakoudy is the bridge that she managed to build not only between Bulgarians and Greeks, but also between the Balkan and Scandinavian peninsulas. Her article, comparing the poetry of Esta Tsiganu (Greece) and Thomas Tranströmer (Sweden), raises the question of whether there are "big" and "small" literatures and whether small literatures can be "big". In this text, Fotiny Christakoudy manages to find more common points than differences between the North and the South.

The review of the scientific achievements of Dr. F. Christakoudy does not cover all her interests and contributions, but only highlights the main accents of her works. The reference from the "Authors" system, which is attached to her documents for participation in the competition, shows that her publications (32 entries) exceed by far the minimum requirements of the law for holding the academic position of "Associate Professor". The fact that her publications have been cited by Bulgarian colleagues and authors from abroad speaks by itself about the achievements of Dr. F. Christakoudy in the scientific field. Her

participation in projects, as well as her numerous participations at international conferences and congresses, testify in the same direction. To the scientific achievements of Dr. Christakoudy should be added her serious employment as a lecturer in modern Greek language and literature at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", her joint work with students, graduates and doctoral students on research and artistic projects, their preparation for participation in conferences and translation competitions.

В заключение, документите и материалите, представени от гл. ас. д-р Фотини Христакуди-Константиниду отговарят на изискванията на Закона за развитие на академичния състав в Република България (ЗРАСРБ) и Правилника за прилагането на ЗРАСРБ. Кандидатката в конкурса е представила достатъчен брой научни трудове, различни от материалите, използвани в предишни конкурси и защиты. Авторската справка за научните приноси и цитирания е коректна. Поради изложеното дотук, убедено давам своята положителна оценка и подкрепям избора на д-р Фотини Христакуди-Константиниду на академичната длъжност „доцент“ в професионално направление 2.1. Филология (Литература на народите от Европа, Америка, Азия, Африка и Австралия – Новогръцка литература).

In conclusion, the documents and materials submitted by Ch. Assistant Professor Dr. Fotiny Christakoudy-Konstantinidou meet the requirements of the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB) and the Regulations for the Implementation of ZRASRB. The candidate in the competition has submitted a sufficient number of scientific papers, other than the materials used in previous competitions and defenses. The author's reference for the scientific contributions and citations is correct. In reference to the abovementioned, I confidently give my positive assessment and support the choice of Dr. Fotiny Christakoudy-Konstantinidou to the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the professional field 2.1. Philology (Literature of the peoples of Europe, America, Asia, Africa and Australia - Modern Greek literature).

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