

Review

by Dr. Dr. Sc. Mirena Slavova, Professor of Ancient Greek at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology of St Kliment Ohridski Sofia University, member of the scientific jury according to order № ПД 38-361/17.07.2021 of the Rector of the University of Sofia on the PhD thesis of Assist. Prof. Nicolay Stefanov Sharankov in the professional field 2.1. Philology (Classical Languages and Epigraphy) offered for the acquisition of the educational and scholarly degree “Doctor”

*As much as epigraphy is an autonomous science and other sciences of antiquity come to its aid, so it is an auxiliary science for them. Therefore, the different sciences of antiquity should not be understood as meticulously limited to artificially delineated narrow boundaries, but as mutually and organically interconnected. It is time, after the detailed elaboration of the principles and methodologies of the isolated fields of knowledge of antiquity, to return to the great concept of the nineteenth century for the *Altertumswissenschaft* as a holistic view of antiquity. This means that every science should be developed in such a way that it does not lose sight of the general phenomenon in the history of mankind which we call the civilization of classical antiquity.*

It is time to admit that almost 20 years ago I started my first review of a PhD dissertation, with a hidden quote from a passage from Georgi Mihailov’s review of my own dissertation, as a sign of respect and in the desire to confirm my inner connection to him. Now I was tempted to do something similar, this time clearly because the author of the opening paragraph of this text is again Georgi Mihailov.¹ More than anyone else, he has a place here – both because Nicolay Sharankov’s dissertation is a continuation of his work, and because it is a perfect accomplishment of Mihailov’s insistence on a comprehensive study of classical antiquity, albeit within a Greek polis.

The exemplary dissertation of Nicolay Sharankov “The ancient inscriptions from Dionysopolis. Edition of texts with commentary and analysis of linguistic and onomastic data” fully corresponds to the interdisciplinarity of the old *Altertumswissenschaft* because it contains new discovered texts, their reading and editing plus a thoroughgoing philological study including linguistic and cultural-historical analysis. Combined with information from other sources from antiquity as coins, artifacts, and manuscripts, it successfully reveals the life of this West Pontic Greek colony for eight centuries, from the IVth c. BC to the IVth century AD. Sharankov’s research also has an additional effect: his work of an excellent epigraph leads to the emendation of some literary texts, as is the case with the text of Pliny the Elder.

¹ Г. Михайлов. Класическа епиграфика. София, 2012, 106.

The dissertation has a volume of 344 pages supplemented by 88 pages of excellent photographs of the inscriptions. Its structure is well thought out. In the Introduction (1–18 pp.) the author discusses the goals, methods and scope of his work, as well as the history of the research of inscriptions from Dionysopolis. His task is to publish a complete corpus of ancient inscriptions from Dionysopolis and to analyze their linguistic and onomastic peculiarities. Inevitably, in addition to all this, he will confront the complex issues of the history of this city, its religion, administrative structure and diplomacy. Even here, some of the most significant contributions of the dissertation are noticeable. In addition to the 37 inscriptions published so far (31 of them in IGBulg I² and V), Sharankov states that he has published 43 new ones, including six Latin inscriptions, as well as six inscriptions found *extra fines*. All inscriptions (with a few exceptions) have been seen *ex autopsia*, which leads to numerous revisions of the already published inscriptions. The epigraphic texts are provided with a translation and dating based on both the fonts of the stone workshops and the internal information mentioned in them. What follows is an extremely valuable, precise and comprehensive review of the studies of the Dionysopolis inscriptions from the first quarter of the 19th century until now. The author knows all publications, has done his own research in the archives of the Austrian Academy of Sciences for the expeditions organized by it and therefore fascinatingly guides the reader on the tracks of the missing stones and the scientific pursuits. Undoubtedly, the most important place here has the study of the remarkable discovery of the Temple of the Pontic Mother, a real treasure of 35 new inscriptions, which found an excellent publisher and interpreter in the person of Sharankov. Another promise for professional realization of the assigned tasks is the fixed matrix in which the inscriptions will be presented, the specifications for the arrangement of the inscriptions and the used Leiden system of edition. As for the linguistic and onomastic analysis, the aim of the dissertation is to trace the specifics of the language of the colony with its phonetic, morphological and lexical features, the dialect, the Greek / Latin relationship, as well as to examine the 550 names attested in the inscriptions, their origin, word formation, naming patterns and sociocultural context.

The tasks are accomplished flawlessly. The text of the dissertation is easy to read, as the author has conceived and overcome the encounter with the difficulties of the object of his study and offers the reader the fruits of his labor and talent. The content at the beginning of the work with a deliberate designation of the inscriptions newly published by the author points well to the typology of the inscriptions. With his known perfectionism and scientific discipline, Sharankov has extracted optimal information and interpreted the monuments in detail, so that the reviewer is in a difficult situation to save some of his achievements in order to fit into the volume of a review. Moreover, he relatively rarely finds himself in front of a dissertation, which is the result of many years of accumulation of knowledge and experience by the candidate. The first part of the dissertation is the publication of the corpus of inscriptions organized in the above-mentioned way. An original and useful solution of the author is to provide each group of inscriptions,

divided by content and dating, with a short sketch, containing generalized observations about its specifics in Dionysopolis. Combined, these essays could be a kind of manual on ancient inscriptions found in the Western Euxine Coast and present an up-to-date supplement to Mihailov's *Classical Epigraphy*. The author specifies the location of each stone as much as possible, using, where necessary, previous publications, Jireček's *Travels in Bulgaria*, and the museum's inventory books. Both the already published and unpublished inscriptions are scrupulously checked (the cases where there was no objective possibility are indicated) for the letter availability, many revised readings are specified in view of the space and size of the letters, and in case of uncertainty of reading this is explicitly noted. Only to illustrate, I would like to point out the new reading of *Argedavon* in such a repeatedly published and commented inscription as the decree of Acornion (№9) and the epithet of Heracles Zusyritas (№60). The restoration of already known fragmentary inscriptions on the basis of the new Dionysopolis inscriptions edited by Sharankov is also a significant contribution, as is the case with №58 according to №57 or №62 to №51.

A translation of the text follows, which accurately and precisely reflects the content of the original, including the well-translated tombstone epigram for Dionysius from Vasada in Lycaonia (E3). In particular, I would like to agree with the new reading and interpretation of lines 40-41 of the Acornion Decree as "personally bears some of the public expenditure". I recommend unifying the translation of ἀσυλεί in honorary decrees as "without taking away their goods".

Further, the more significant linguistic and orthographic peculiarities are noted and a cultural-historical commentary is offered, which sheds light on hitherto unknown aspects of the history, religion, administrative system and politics of Dionysopolis.

Although the linguistic features are discussed in the second part of the dissertation, Sharankov does not fail to make here important clarifications about the language of the inscriptions, including the Thracian names. For example, his observations on the suffix -εἰθα(ς)/-εἰθια(ς), shared in note 171, are very instructive about the Thracian divine epithets in Lower Moesia, and those (*passim*) for the use of Ionic forms associated with Ionian religious cults (cf. №38 and note 149) are also relevant and true. These notes are short and do not complicate the presentation, as they are important for understanding the text. Therefore, it seems to me that in the last dedicatory inscription №66 on a mirror it is good to comment on the form αῶξι. The dissertation considers the official documents as a source for the administrative style and language of the colony and pays special attention to the legal wording of the texts. Such are, for instance, his original observations of βουλή δῆμος as a Greek variant of the *senatus populusque Romanus* (№14) or of the word φιλότιμος as a noun, supported by a parallel from Augusta Trayana, in the sense of a "generous sponsor".

The cultural-historical comments deserve special attention, as they highly enrich our ideas about life in the colony and in many aspects.

In the field of cult and sacred practices, for the first time in inscriptions from our lands we come across phenomena such as the liberation and consecration of slaves to gods (№14) or the bequest of property, the proceeds of which are used for religious celebrations and rituals (similar to of the waqfs) in №13, duly commented with parallels. Special mention should be made of the extensive convincing considerations and parallels about the specifics of the cult of the Pontic Mother, the observations on the office of the lifelong priests and deities as priests in the absence of a priest, the confirmation of the cult of Derzala as an important god in Dionysopolis, the specifics of female worship of the Mother Goddess, and etc. I can't help noticing another significant contribution of this part of the analysis of the inscriptions – the prosopographic one. After Sharankov's work, it is possible to identify representatives of the elite of Dionysopolis in their family relations and official duties, as well as these of other cities or of the Roman provincial administration, as is the case with Titus Vitrasius Pollio. Sharankov relies on inscriptions from other cities such as Callatis, Istria, Odessos and many other places in Asia Minor to make connections and to shape the portrait of these people. This also happens with the name of the Scythian ruler Acrosalus, known so far only by its first component from coins (№28), which the author often uses for verification. The revised reading of the ring of the sports association of Tarsians, hitherto considered as an attribute of *mystae* is no less remarkable.

The second part of the work (from p. 174 onwards) is the linguistic study itself of the epigraphic corpus, covering the phonetics, morphology, vocabulary and onomastics of the inscriptions.

In the field of phonetics Sharankov shows versatility in the history of phonetic changes and the ancient Greek dialects, expresses in-depth and logical judgments on the relationship pronunciation / graphics. Some of the new and contributing achievements are as follows:

- shedding light on the problem of the origin of the colony, which is by no means unequivocally Ionian;
- the rational interpretation of $\mu\gamma\acute{\alpha}\delta\epsilon\varsigma$ Ἑλληνας in Pseudo-Scymnos rather as a mixed population of multidialectal Greeks;
- the retrieval of the itacistic pronunciation of <H> to a later date (p.189);
- valuable observations on the aspiration of vocals in the initial position (p. 200, here it is better to denote [h] as a glottal fricative) and on the syllable boundary.

In the field of morphology, Sharankov reports, documents and duly explains the phenomena in declension and conjugation typical of the whole postclassical Greek language and due to analogy and the economy of effort such as genitive = nominative minus sigma, syncope, contamination between First and Third declension, forms of the Second aorist of -α, imposition of the characteristic -κα in the plural of the Second conjugation.

Vocabulary is reasonably considered in the combination of word-formation and semantic analysis. The author creates a useful corpus of nouns of -ιον, some of which have not yet been attested in our monuments (κόσμιον, προνάιον, τυπίον, χορήγιον), and on the other hand, he makes valuable observations on the vocabulary of concepts from the state system, topography (ξυλόπολις), and the cult (κισσαφόρισσα, ἀφέτη). Sharankov's observations on the place of the Latin language (p. 229 et seq.) in the Greek-speaking colony of Dionysopolis are concise but informative. The use of Latin here is no different from that in the other West Pontic cities, where there were no numerous Roman administration and soldiers. The 14 lexemes of Latin origin are naturally related to the army and the administration of the Romans.

The attested proper names, 550 in number (of which 68% Greek, 12% Latin, 7.5% Thracian and 4.5 Asia Minor), are the subject of scrutiny from p. 232 onwards. This chapter, very well structured and thoughtfully organized, brings together observations on word formation, semantics and origin of names with prosopographic information. Thus, it becomes a compact, informative and extremely scrupulous onomastic study, in which the author's professionalism is demonstrated. His considerations based on rational arguments and high competence are always convincing. I especially would like to emphasize the pages (pp. 263-268) on the transmission of Latin names in Greek language milieu and with the resources of the Greek alphabet, which was not done after Mihailov in his monograph on the language of Greek inscriptions from the early 1940s. The Thracian and Asia Minor names follow, represented with all features related to their classification and formation.

In the field of the toponyms (pp. 277–295), Sharankov represents his own discovery and emendation on *Rocole* in Pliny the Elder, which has already entered into scientific circulation, as well as the two ancient names of the city, Dionysopolis and Crunoi. He provides the Greek and Latin literary evidence for them as far as Theophanes and Cedrenus, creating in this way a corpus of sources for the city with translation. The third important point in the part about toponyms is the supposed gloss ΔΑΒΑ. One of the many contributions of the candidate is to demystify the delusion that this is a Thracian gloss meaning *city*.

The conclusion (pp. 296–300) summarizes the contributions of the work concisely and analytically. They consist in the exemplary publication of Dionysopolis inscriptions, accompanied by linguistic and cultural-historical commentary, introduction of new epigraphic monuments, analysis of their linguistic characteristics in a period of eight centuries, observations on various specific phenomena in the field of onomastics – anthroponyms and toponyms. The professionally and precisely made indices (pp. 316–344) and the appendix with photos of the monuments further increase the value of this work, far exceeding the requirements for a small doctorate, which must be published in Bulgarian and a foreign language. The author demonstrates the high professionalism of a classical philologist, an epigraphist and a historian of classical languages, who comprehends the ancient texts and handles them equally skillfully, regardless of whether they are published or written on stones, parchment or coins.

Following the traditions and achievements of classical philology in Bulgaria, Nicolay Sharankov makes a significant step forward in the study of classical languages and the history of our lands in antiquity.

Finally, I would like to add a few formal but important clarifications: the dissertation has made the achievements of his dissertation available to the scientific community (17 articles and studies in Bulgarian and five in foreign editions); the presented abstract corresponds to the content and spirit of the dissertation; the procedure has been completed without omissions.

Conclusion: All considerations mentioned above give me reason to recommend to the esteemed scientific jury to award Nicolay Sharankov the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” with the clear awareness that in his face classical philology and epigraphy in our country has an acknowledged professional and in-depth researcher of worldwide reputation.

Sofia, 3rd of September 2021

Prof. Mirena Slavova