

## REVIEW

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Of the doctoral thesis of Plamena Georgieva Kostova, full-time PhD student at the Department of Cyril and Methodius Studies, Faculty of Slavonic Languages at Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski

On the topic:

### ***The Repose of St John the Theologian (BHG 916) in the Southern Slavonic Tradition: Text and Context***

submitted for the purposes of awarding the educational and academic degree of Doctor of Philosophy

In the area of higher education 2. Humanities

Professional field: 2.1. Philology

Scientific major: Bulgarian Literature (Old Bulgarian Literature)

Doctoral supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Diana Atanasova-Pencheva, PhD

#### 1. Educational and professional qualification of the PhD candidate

Plamena Georgieva Kostova obtained her bachelor's degree in Bulgarian Philology from the University of Veliko Tarnovo (2013–2017). She has shown strong interest in the area of Mediaeval Studies ever since her university years. As a result of her additional work on Old Bulgarian Language, mediaeval literature, history and culture, she has acquired profound and comprehensive knowledge in the area of literary and linguistic mediaeval studies, and became acquainted with the specifics of mediaeval Christian culture. She has also studied the methodology of several theoretical branches of mediaeval studies and developed skills of working with mediaeval texts, analysis and systematization of large amounts of information. Her practical work has involved reviewing existent research on the *Codex Suprasliensis* and conducting an independent investigation on the topic of *The Life of the Holy Martyrs of Amorium in the Codex Suprasliensis*, which she successfully defended as a BA thesis in June 2017.

From 2017 to 2018 Plamena Kostova received excellent training in the field of Old Bulgarian literature and culture, mediaeval cultural heritage, Old Bulgarian language, and working with manuscripts and archive collections in her master's degree course in Old Bulgarian Studies at Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski. Under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Diana Atanasova-Pencheva, PhD the candidate defended her master's thesis on *The Silence of St Barbara in Southern Slavonic Calendar Collections: Research and Publication of the Text*.

A natural continuation of the professional development of Plamena Kostova was the period of her doctoral studies at the Department of Cyril and Methodius Studies (enrolled by ПД20-155/21.01.2019 and dismissed with a right to a defense by ПД 20-508/24.02.2022) under the tutelage of assoc. prof. Diana Atanasova-Pencheva, PhD.

In September 2022 the doctoral candidate Plamena Kostova was appointed an assistant at the Institute for Literature of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Section of Old Bulgarian Literature.

To the present day the candidate has published 13 articles, of which 5 in referenced journals, and several in print. She is the compiler of two conference proceedings, and participated in scientific projects internal and external for SU and in the organization of scientific forums.

In view of her current publishing, research and project activity, her skills as an organizer, coordinator and administrator of scientific forums, the acquired teaching experience and active work as a masters and doctoral student at the Department of Cyril and Methodius Studies at Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski, I consider Plamena Kostova a highly qualified and successful young scientist, having the necessary competence and experience, and significant potential for academic growth.

## 2. Procedure and materials for the doctoral thesis

The procedure for the organization of the public defense has been held according to the regulations for the terms and rules in the Statute on the conditions and order for acquisition of academic degrees and conferral of academic ranks in SU (SCOAADCARSU) with respect to the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Rules for its application. The Academic Jury received all necessary documents and materials, collected by virtue of art. 67, par. 5 of SCOAADCARSU.

The doctoral thesis is original work and contains scientific results with contributions in the field of philological mediaeval studies (art. 64, par. 1 of SCOAADCARSU). The selected topic is pertinent and developed on the basis of a clearly constructed concept, emphasizing the relation between the object of research/ analysis/ results and perspectives. The approach to the topic is innovative. The formal criteria for the type, volume and structure of the doctoral thesis have been respected (art. 64, par. 2 of SCOAADCARSU). Everywhere in the text the citations are correct and the terminological use is clearly defined.

## 3. Characteristics of the doctoral thesis and the abstract thesis

The doctoral thesis of Plamena Georgieva Kostova is discussed and proposed for public defense and amounts to a volume of 422 pages with two parts: Research with an introduction, six chapters and conclusion (pp. 3–193) and Appendix (pp. 194–422). The topic is formulated adequately and the title fully reflects the content of the reviewed text.

**The first part – *Research*** (pp. 3–193) successfully develops certain theses with which we are already familiar from the articles of Plamena Kostova published in specialized research journals. This inquiry allows us to evaluate not only the submitted dissertation, but also the working process and the research manner of the author. The realization of the character of her research activity as

a process, that continues well after publishing, is signaled at several places in the text – for instance, the suggestion for the Greek protograph, which in itself is a significant contribution of the candidate (p. 188, p. 140; Abstract thesis, p. 17), the attempt to translate into New Bulgarian *The Repose of St John the Theologian*, accompanied by a critical edition of the text (Abstract thesis, p. 20), etc.

In the **introduction** (pp. 3–6) the candidate defines the object of research – *Repose (Act? – my note, NG) of St John the Theologian* – a text which has not been studied independently. The reason for limiting the research to the presence of the text in Southern Slavonic calendar collections: “thus, we could follow both the way of the work from Byzantine into the Slavonic context, as well as the history of the text in a specific type of compilations” (pp. 3-4). The aims of the study are defined in view of the chosen “philological approach to *The Repose of John the Theologian*” into two groups: first, archeographic and textual research, and second, literary interpretation.

The proposed specific tasks point to the model of some contemporary strategies for hagiographic study, based on comparative-textual and literary-theoretical research methods with an expected scientific result: “on one side, the clarification of the history of text in a specific literary and cultural context, and on the other, revealing and analyzing of purely literary particularities and techniques, which are innate to it” (p. 5)

The problem with establishment and spreading of the cult of St John the Theologian in the Southern Slavonic manuscript tradition is a subject of research in the **first chapter (the Cult of St John the Theologian, pp. 7–17)**. As a prelude to the topic (pp. 7–12) the candidate has included information about St John the Theologian (from the New Testament, patristic literature and Holy Tradition). In view of the whole concept of the reviewed study, I think that this hagiobiographic fragment (pp. 7–9) would appear much more persuasively here in the context of certain contemporary theological studies. Because my task is to indicate those contributions of the doctoral thesis which give legal proof to awarding the educational and academic degree of Doctor of Philosophy, I limit my notes below only to the research parameters, listed in the introduction.

The essential introduction summarizes the existent scientific evidence for the formation of the cult of St John the Theologian and shows the need for studying the whole tradition of spreading the text in the Southern Slavonic area and in the context of its existence in the Greek manuscript tradition. The precise observations and the true formulations show that the author is well-oriented in research literature. The archeographic review of the copies has been carefully studied and properly structured, and the textual history is well-presented: Plamena Kostova has analyzed the context of the origin and spread of the cult of St John the Theologian, by noting all accessible copies and studies.

Three basic points regard the three directions into which the textual history of the *Repose* are traced: from the accessible catalogues and reference books the author has shown the texts which serve the cult of the saint in the Byzantine (**1.1. Texts about St John the Theologian in the Byzantine tradition, pp. 13–14**) and the Slavonic (**1.2 St John the Theologian in the Slavonic tradition, p. 15**) manuscript tradition and on the basis of specific observations she infers that the “cult of the saint was served by multiple texts in both traditions” (p. 15). As a main source of information, the

author has used the reference book of Kl. Ivanova for Slavonic hagiographic narratives and rhetorical works BHBS, which lists the known Southern Slavonic copies and shows the supposed Greek protograph.

The brief synaxaria (**1.3. Synaxarial readings for St John the Theologian in the Slavonic and Byzantine manuscript tradition**, pp. 16–17) are presented according to the archeographic data by M. Spasova (2015:78–80) and the sources cited there with the presumption that they do not fall within the range of the doctoral research. I think that a literary-interpretative comparison of the *Rest* and the synaxarial readings which Plamena Kostova might realize successfully in her future studies is an important approach to building a full textual image of the formation and spread of the cult of the saint in the Southern Slavonic area for the purposes of future hagiologic research.

In this part of the work Plamena Kostova has shown her ability to extract data from scientific and reference literature relevant to the subject of her philological study. The systematization of the Slavonic manuscripts and their Greek counterparts is undoubtedly a contribution to outlining the volume and character of Old Bulgarian literature in translation and the context of its spread.

**The second chapter (*Rest of St John the Theologian*, pp. 18-19)** presents the content and structure of the manuscript. The short plots in its content are graphically separated (pp. 18-35), which facilitates their further citation. The retelling of their content does not entail analyses or interpretations, which leads me to the supposition that this deed has been conceived as a first step to the realization of a translation into New Bulgarian for publishing in parallel to the critical edition of the text.

The steps of reflection on the manuscript have been defined:

**History of the text** (pp. 30–31) – the candidate has commented on the existing hypotheses on the question of place and time of origin of the text and of its authorship. Plamena Kostova subdues to a verification the known scientific facts, by widening her view to the cultural-historical context of its origin and spread. The adoption of a complex approach for the analysis leads to important inferences with unarguable scientific contribution.

**History of research** (pp. 32–35) – It includes a review of the research on the questions outlined above. I appreciate the skill of Plamena Kostova to elicit the most adequate information from the large volume of literary and theoretical works for her analytical approach to the manuscript. Her inclination to revise existing hypotheses (see e.g. p. 33) and to build her own position on the basis of her personal research experience is one of the contributing moments in this part of her research. Her reasoning, however, might develop successfully if a wider interdisciplinary approach were included. The loyalty to the chosen theoretical-research horizon does not allow her to look at the travel of John and Prochorus (p. 33), for instance, not only as movement in space, but also as an act of preachers whose goal is not to take the shortest road from the beginning to the end, but rather to preach the Christian gospel on their journey on Earth (I think that this fact is relevant to the questions to which the author is trying to provide a response); by qualifying the names of non-existent towns as the *fruit of the imagination* (p. 33): may she not forget that besides the toponyms that are familiar to us nowadays, the manuscripts include local names which serve a specific geographic area (e.g. an anthroponym, which became a toponym used locally), etc.

After the review of the hypotheses the author, true to her methodology, has drawn specific conclusions. Her investigative diligence and curiosity have guided her to compare texts (at different levels) to search common points and *encounter* opposing positions which has led to recapitulations, such as: “Prochorus very carefully and assiduously selects the sources which he uses to create his own text. On one side we observe elements from the old *Acts of John*, however transformed. On the other, the work of Prochorus is related to the Syrian tale of John the Theologian, and thirdly, Prochorus uses information about his teacher which is typical only for his work” (p. 34)

The textual approach is realized into three structural parts:

Regarding the Greek compilations, which include the *Repose* (**2.1. *Repose of St John the Theologian in the Byzantine tradition***, pp. 36–43), the observations are limited to: “Because the *Repose of St John the Theologian* is spread on Southern Slavonic soil in old issued calendar collections, we shall focus the current research only on two types of compilations, indicated by the German scholar [Albert Erhardt – my note, NG]: *panaegyricomartyrologies and menologies*” (p. 36). The presence of the text in different types of collections is illustrated with specific examples and through a review of the scientific information both on the text, and the context of its spread. The inferences of the doctoral candidate (p. 43) clearly show her skill to summarize and systematize the data with respect to the specific tasks she has set to herself: “The review of the Greek context in which the *Repose of St John the Theologian* is spread is important because through it we might trace not only the transmission of the narrative of John from Byzantine into Slavonic context, but also follow the history in a certain type of collections in which it was included” (p. 43).

The Southern Slavonic copies in the collections with permanent compilation, mainly menologies (**2.2. *Repose of St John the Theologian in the Slavonic tradition***, pp. 44–52) are presented in three groups according to the three editions of the *Repose* in the classification of Kl. Ivanova (BHBS:224-226). An important task, which Plamena Kostova has addressed, is to study “the relationships between the separate copies and their relations to the Greek original”. The lack of wholesome research on this question has determined the observations of the candidate in this part of the study as undoubtedly contributing for the establishment of the context where the text is reproduced. The copies are chronologically presented, the available scientific information about them and the compilation and character of the codes in which they are situated is commented and summarized.

The philological sensitivity of Plamena Kostova directs her to interesting details, which she analyzes by comparing the Greek and Southern Slavonic manuscripts, which she comments and on which she further infers, e.g. “It is curious why an apocrypha, such as the *Repose* has acquired such a wide spread in the canonic literature? I think that this is due to two reasons: (1) as is seen from the review of the Byzantine manuscripts, the *Repose* is the only hagiographic text in the compilation of the referred collections, i.e. it is popular because of the absence of another narrative. (2) The *Repose* has managed to “overcome” its nomination as a *forbidden* text and has started to perform another function, namely, to serve the need of a text which will mark the cult of the saint” (p. 51). Thus, Plamena Kostova reaches the right conclusion that the reverse mechanism is also

possible – to enrich the clerical tradition on the basis of popular beliefs. I find that the fame of the manuscript is due to its compilatory character, which contains didactic, engaging and familiar topos.

Plamena Kostova enters the world of the manuscript by presenting its structure (2.3. **Structure of the *Rest of St John the Theologian***, pp. 53–59). In agreement with the research strategy announced in the beginning, she adopts already established scientific methods of reading and analysis of hagiographic text, by introducing competently and successfully motivated her literary-interpretative approach. Here I register a certain one-sidedness in the bibliographic knowledge of the candidate.

This does not, however, compromise the high merit of her work, which presents her as a philologist with an excellent preparation and significant potential for development.

My observations on her analyses, commentaries, terminological definitions and specifications, and conceptually justified conclusions, however, show a bias to the selected theoretical-research model, which she attempts to apply with methodological pedantry, even when it is unproductive. I consider it my duty to recommend to the author to strive to see the text from other positions in order to find her own, to judge whether her approach is adequate to the object of her studies so that she could manage to answer questions, such as: whether the exile is the reason for the writing of the divinely inspired books (p. 56), whether some of the names of towns are the fruit of the author's imagination and if their use may be related to the claim that "John the Theologian inhabits the realm of the "sinful world". This *place* is representative in hagiographic texts of *the apostolic type*" (p. 57) and "the time and space are necessary to show the unchangeable image of the hagiographic character" (p. 57) and to reconsider recapitulations of the type "the *Rest of St John the Theologian* lacks rhetorical parts, as well as the storyline exposition, which introduces us to the character. We might define that on one side as a deviation from the storyline structure of the hagiographic work. On the other, the absence of these parts may be related to the early origins of the text... In other words, the *Rest* carry the signs *dometaphrastic* hagiographic works" (pp. 58-59). It might be good for Plamena Kostova to consider the character and the aims of mediaeval fiction when she describes its character. In order to realize the message and the world of literature, the objective reading does not only rely on the classical, but also on new research tools: the high theoretical-methodological and literary-interpretative achievements in the humanities show that the method is not borrowed, but rather created for each specific research process.

The main task, which Plamena Kostova sets out for herself in the **third chapter (*Rest of St John the Theologian: narrative specifics***, pp. 60-83) is to "follow narrative approaches which are more archaic and which we know from pre-Christian literature. These are plot and storyline models which have been drawn from other types of texts" (p. 60). The author follows some fundamental theoretical groundings, dedicated to the genre, which she then systematizes in the course of the exposition, in order to justify her choice of research approach and then applies on the analyzed text models that work in science (see pp. 61–62), which shows her good theoretical preparation in the interpretation of the manuscript.

Plamena Kostova adopts a scientific thesis, investigates the complete sources from which that thesis draws its arguments and consistently applies it in her study. Her investigative spirit, however, constantly directs her to new scientific fields – in her analyses she does not satisfy herself with identifying one or another storyline element or rhetorical technique, but rather seeks the reasons for its usages, and attempts to explain its role for the messages and suggestions of the manuscript from various points of view. Thus, her scientific search crosses the boundaries of the presented several motifs, plot and storyline models, defined in science in relation to other texts (p. 65), and make her research recognizable with the specifics of the literary analysis, the multilayered language and consistent academic style.

The author claims that the *Repose of St John the Theologian* “contains elements that are typical for other, more archaic narrative structures” (p. 65), which explains the reason why two approaches are applied to show the archaic nature of the plot. The first refers the text to ancient romances – from the comparison with Homer’s Ulysses, the doctoral candidate draws several motifs and speculates about their symbolic value in ancient and Christian cultural context (pp. 66-76). It is impressive that Plamena Kostova masters this literary-comparative approach to the mediaeval text and manifests her interpretative abilities.

The second approach, applied successfully to the *Repose* is the one of Vladimir Propp, which is typical for the fairy tale (p. 76). I find it appropriate for Plamena Kostova to consult her observations in this part of the study with a theological point of view, in order to explain, for instance, what is this “superpower” of the protagonist and to distinguish the cultural layers, the art specifics in different epochs reflected in the compared works. A number of examples in the area of interdisciplinary mediaeval studies would enrich the analysis of the text in this part. In this way, some imprecisions can be corrected, such as the victory over the antagonist shows the “holiness of John” (p. 81) – we must not forget that holiness is a state which a person reaches in the process of his spiritual growth along his life path and there is no way to prove it in the lifetime of the righteous person (when the purpose of the manifestation of God’s grace through him is different), or: “John did not give up preaching the faith in Christ, therefore after his death he became “God-pleaser” (p. 83) – in fact John was a God pleaser prior to his repose, which proves that he did not experience death – in the sense of spiritual state – and during his lifetime he was sanctified and that is why he was canonized by the Church. It is clear that in similar cases the strict rigidity of the adopted approach does not work. It is advisable for the researcher to consult specialists when encountering problems that can only be addressed through knowledge from other scientific fields, and read the recommended literature. Therefore, I recommend that Plamena Kostova should include other areas of human knowledge in her future research – in fact, this is characteristic of the work of the philologist.

Except for similar type of notes (in my opinion, not insignificant), I highly evaluate the ability of the author to use extensive knowledge to back her conception, to boldly declare her choice in the scholarly field, and to leave space for upgrading: “In this chapter of the research we presented one of the possible research perspectives through which the *Repose of St John the Theologian* may be approached. The aim is to show a literary continuity not only at the level of structure, but also at the level of plot, as we shall see in the following parts of the study” (p. 83).

**The fourth chapter (Main motifs in the hagiographic text on St John Theologian, pp. 84–117)** is an attempt to determine the literary characteristics of the *Repose* through an analysis of the main motifs and the rhetorical techniques. Plamena Kostova sets herself a task to answer the question whether and how the functionality of the text has influenced the artistic means used to build the image and to form the narrative as a whole. In the course of her work she has established two groups of motifs: *topos* motifs (pp. 84–117) and *wandering* motifs (pp. 100–107). The two notions are defined by established conceptions which the author has chosen to follow when she made her observations. The motifs are illustrated with several examples which are analyzed in an original way. Plamena Kostova adopts an analytical approach to the interpretation of the *topoi* and her literary inferences by highlighting the variations in meaning between the examples illustrating each motif according to the different contexts of its existence.

Outside the scope of the researcher remain some contemporary mediaeval studies which would enrich for instance the analysis of the motif for *giving away the earthly riches* (p. 89), *undressing the robe* (pp. 90–91), *dressing a woman into a man's clothes* (p. 91) and the conclusion (“The act of parting with the material could be defined as an earthly deed which secures heavenly bliss”, p. 92) would sound more convincing. I believe that the author's conception of the approach to the manuscript might be highlighted more convincingly if she searched for more points of view on the problems under discussion. Perhaps because of this one-sidedness, some of the conclusions of Plamena Kostova remain unfinished, even though they may lead to new directions of her research interest.

The great works of art which we admire today prove that what is created by the human genius is born neither in the clash nor in ignoring, but in communication, in the open dialogue of cultural spaces – both diachronically and synchronically. As far back as 1975, S. S. Averintsev defended the idea that the interpretation of mediaeval culture is “possible only as a dialogue of two conceptual systems – *of old and ours*”. Thus, the *motif of resurrection* (p. 96) will be correctly interpreted if the researcher knows that in the early Christian period the ship symbolizes salvation in the Church, while for the resurrection other (early Christian) symbols emerged: the depiction of Jonah the Prophet, Lazarus' resurrection, of the Myrrh-bearing Women who talk with the Angel near the empty tomb of Christ (in contrast to some familiar depictions of Christ's Resurrection, which appear later, in the post-iconoclastic period). I am convinced that a valuable analysis of spiritual phenomena such as *healing, resurrection, exorcism, vow* etc. (discussed in the reviewed work) can be done within the framework of a wider interpreting process.

The researcher focuses her attention on the four symbols (*the mountain, the colour symbolism, right-left, and the city*) (pp. 107–117) drawing comparisons with Old Testament and New Testament images, parallels with other hagiographic texts, and making specific scholarly observations. Again, a part of the mediaeval studies has remained outside the literature review. It will be better if Plamena Kostova keeps in mind that sometimes in analytical work the true methodological approach may not be the one we have chosen, but the one applicable to the analyzed text. That is why research activity requires constant vigilance and wide knowledge of literature. I recommend while interpreting the symbolic meanings to first specify whether it is about a general, or a Christian symbol. In the second case, the author must clarify its meaning in



Christian art, and only then to make wider analogies and interpretations of its symbolic meanings in art from other epochs (see p. 112).

It is necessary to mention that in Plamena Kostova's work we can find valid scientific arguments with a broader meaning in cultural studies: "in mediaeval literature... the symbols and images are key to understanding the text and often refer to the Bible. In the early scriptures, such as the analyzed hagiographic manuscript, we witness how Christianity adapts symbols and images from Antiquity and recreates them to serve Christian ideology" (p. 115).

We find valuable observations of Plamena Kostova at the end of the fourth chapter – the commentaries on the presence of the narrator (pp. 115–117) (the story is recounted on behalf of Prochorus). The accurate inferences of the author (p. 116) address the question of Pseudo-Prochorus, the purpose of such type of *talking* etc, and extend the reception of the fictional space of the text.

One of the most valuable achievements of the research work of Plamena Kostova is the investigation of the metatextual presence of the Bible in the narrative on St John the Theologian, realized in **the fifth chapter (Biblical references, pp. 118–136)**. The function of the Biblical metatext as an important marker for the attribution of the text is clarified. The terminological clarifications and the conception of the place of such type of research in a mediaeval study are a good approach to the topic (p. 118). Fundamental scholarly achievements in addressing this question have been carefully noted (Kr. Stanchev, Al. Naumov, D. Kenanov, R. Pikió, N. Frye, etc.).

The Biblical metatext is presented into two groups: *exact references* (pp. 120–129) and *analogies* (pp. 129–136); the context of the usage of each example is interpreted. Interesting parallels for the presence of the excerpted material in other contexts have been searched for, and the intertextual links are illustrated. I consider the inclusion of the interpretations of St John Chrysostom and St Cyril of Alexandria to each citation as a valuable contribution. The researcher has not dismissed typical narrative techniques (for instance, the ways to introduce Biblical references); she has sought for the meaning relations between the Biblical citations interpolated in the text, highlighting their artistic function to depict a saint of an apostolic type (p. 129).

It is worth noting that the specific observations on each of the analogies and the found semantic links with the Biblical text have led the doctoral candidate to true and well-defined inferences, such as: "In summary, we will mention two things: 1. The analyzed analogy shows how one and the same reference to the Biblical text may be interpreted in a different way, depending on the context in which it is found, and 2. This example illustrates how the Word of the Holy Scripture has been intertwined in the speech of the character" (p. 130). In this way a depth in the clarification of the content and the style of the manuscript is achieved – an important contribution to our mediaeval literary studies.

The analogies are interpreted through the prism of Biblical imagery and in parallel to their usage in other mediaeval works, in mythology and some non-Christian cultural traditions. In this type of analysis the existing scientific achievements are also taken into account (D. Petkanova, Kl. Ivanova, Hr. Trendafilov, D. Kenanov, Kr. Stanchev, M. Gardzaniti, N. Gagova, etc.). The author

is using Biblical citations to explain the behavior of the characters from Christian perspective and to find the message of the text.

Thus introduced, the study acquires sufficient order in which Plamena Kostova's ideas for expanding her directions of research are visible. I admit that her work is undoubtedly valuable and should be highly esteemed. I recommend the theological terminology to be introduced with a Greek equivalent and wherever needed to be defined in a footnote.

At the beginning of the **sixth chapter (Textual specifics of the *Repose of St John the Theologian. Translation and revisions*, pp. 137–188)** the author notes the points of reference which she uses to date the Old Bulgarian translation (pp. 137–140). The problem of the translation techniques is explained in detail in accordance with significant scholarly achievements (A. Mincheva, D. Kenanov, M. Dimitrova, etc.). The textual analysis of the copies with a review on the differences in their reading (lexical, morphological and syntactical; omissions and amendments), illustrated in tables allows Plamena Kostova to draw important conclusions (p. 138), on the basis of which she makes a systematization of the Southern Slavonic copies into three main groups (p. 138): **6.1. Revision II: Textual notes** (pp. 141–164); **6.2. Revision I: Textual notes** (pp. 165–182), and **6.3. Revision III: Textual notes** (pp. 183–188). In the three sections the author presents the linguistic characteristics of the copies, and with specific examples shows the differences between them at various levels. The excerpted material is analyzed accurately. Each of the conclusion is well-justified and argumentative.

I find this part of the study very important because it shows how the creation of the text is attributed through language specifics and how the analysis of the textual history of the translation is embedded. The author could elaborate on the question whether these copies constitute a system when compared to the Greek text, so that we may talk efficiently about *textual analysis*, however, the grouping by similarities/ information blocks and their comparison remains crucially important with respect to future research. I think that Plamena Kostova excellently describes and analyzes the grammatical categories of the language. In her textual work there are very valuable findings, which are significant for attributing the text. This chapter of the doctoral thesis has an unarguable contribution to paleoslavonic studies and proves the scientific competence of the researcher.

The textual analysis gives a better idea about the changes, which incurred in the text as a result of its continuous reproduction. In this context Plamena Kostova draws an important and perspective conclusion: “the Slavonic text of the *Repose of St John the Theologian* has a comparatively uniform tradition, given that the differences, which can be identified between the separate copies, included in the Southern Slavonic calendar compilations are a result of the continuous existence of the text. As for the Greek original, we observe discrepancies between it and the Slavonic translation. At this stage of the research I think that the Greek text, published by Tsan is probably not the basic source of the Slavonic translation. A further investigation into the Greek narrative might complement and enrich the picture which describes the textual specifics of the *Repose*... in my work I compared the Slavonic copies to the Greek narrative from manuscript Vatic455, published by Andreas Birch in his study *Auctarium codicis apocryph: N.T. Fabriciani*. The edition is incomplete and some superscript signs are missing, therefore, it remains outside the limits of the present doctoral thesis. I suppose that the text from Vatic455 underlies the Slavonic translation.

That is why my further investigations will be related to finding and researching the Greek text of the manuscript in question” (p. 188).

The **conclusion** (pp. 189–193) offers in systematized form the key moments of each structural part of the doctoral thesis and the more important inferences are drawn.

**The second part – Appendix** (pp. 194–404) contains a publication of the text *Repose of St John the Theologian* according to the Southern Slavonic copies of the full version of the Old Bulgarian translation, the result of an enormous philological work, exercised by Plamena Kostova. The text is issued independently for the first time based on copies by the three revision groups.

The publication reflects the contemporary trends for graphic and structural formatting. The editing principles are described (**1.1. Principles of submitting the texts**, pp. 194–195), the text is reproduced with optimal accuracy and contains information about the codicological and paleographic specifics, which is important for any further Slavonic studies. The publication is realized in parts, matching the revision groups (**1.2. *Repose of St John the Theologian* (ZIII p. 24) (I revision, I group)** (pp. 196–151); **1.3. *Repose of St John the Theologian* (Pp. 59) (I revision, II group)** (pp. 252–309); **1.4. *Repose of St John the Theologian* (Деч95) (II revision)** (pp. 310–360); **1.5. *Repose of St John the Theologian* (Хил431) (III revision)** (pp. 361–404), and is equipped with textual and critical toolkit, as to each part there is a specification for the choice of the main text and the copy on which the different readings are based.

Undoubtedly, this work requires an in-depth linguistic knowledge and excellent philological training. The imprecisions in the reading of the text from the manuscripts may be easily corrected by a revision by specialists during the preparation of the doctoral thesis for publishing.

The **bibliography** (405–420) contains a total of 134 units, of which 115 titles in Bulgarian and 19 titles in English, German and Greek (languages which Plamena Kostova uses fluently for her research purposes), and is accompanied by a **List of the used abbreviations of manuscripts** (p. 421).

The **abstract thesis** presents the content of the dissertation accurately and truthfully in a systematic way. It reflects not only the conducted investigations, but also the inferences and hypotheses made, and the conclusions reached by Plamena Kostova.

#### 4. Conclusion

The doctoral thesis submitted for review undoubtedly has a contributing character. It attests to the research qualities and philological abilities of Plamena Kostova. Some of the drawbacks are purely technical and are not difficult to avoid, others pose serious challenges not only to the author, but also to our entire mediaeval linguistic community which, apart from mastering the research heritage, is conscientiously seeking new paths that are not always smooth. As an accomplished philologist, Plamena Kostova has managed to analyse and evaluate the results of various approaches to hagiographic texts, and drawing on them to reach her well-grounded conclusions. The appendices to the dissertation show a good knowledge of the contemporary editing principles and can contribute to the critical publishing of the text as part of a monograph.

The analysis of the doctoral thesis shows that Plamena Kostova has profound theoretical knowledge in the field of mediaeval literary studies and textology and possesses the necessary qualities and skills to conduct independent research.

In view of the legal requirements (art. 64, par. 1 of the SCOAADCARSU) and the arguments presented above, I strongly recommend that the honorable jury confer the educational and academic degree of Doctor of Philology on Plamena Georgieva Kostova.

15.5.2023

Veliko Tarnovo

Reviewer:

(Assoc. Prof. Nevena Gavazova, PhD)