REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fotini Yannis Christakoudi-Konstantinidou, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Subject: Doctoral dissertation of doctoral student Liliana Beyleri with scientific supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ekaterina Tarpomanova on the topic: “Literary and scientific contribution of the writer Toma Katsori in Bulgarian-Albanian literary contacts” in professional field: 2.1. Philology; scientific specialty: Literature of the peoples of Europe, America, Asia, Africa and Australia (Albanian literature)

Liliana Beyleri is a Master of Laws, a full-time doctoral student since 2022 at the Department of General, Indoeuropean and Balkan Linguistics (DGIBL). She graduated from the American College in Sofia. Her biography outlines her as an interdisciplinary specialist who is originally connected to Albania and through her family naturally communicates with the Albanian diaspora in Bulgaria. In her motivation letter, she draws attention to the fact that although an economist by education, Toma Katsori turned to the literary field (and very successfully), and she herself from the legal sphere chose to make a turn to literary criticism in order to follow the life and creative work of this prominent representative of the Albanian immigration in Bulgaria. L. Beyleri’s work received high praise at the internal defense at the DGIBL, and her activity as a doctoral student exceeds the criteria required for the defense of the relevant educational degree. Here we should note the first prize awarded to her at the 18th National Philological Readings at the Southwestern University in Blagoevgrad for a presentation on the topic “The Paleo-Balkan Theme in the Stories of the Albanian Writer in Bulgaria Toma Katsori (1922-2008)”.

The dissertation work of L. Beyleri, dedicated to the artistic and scientific contribution of the writer Toma Katsori to the Bulgarian-Albanian literary contacts, consists of five chapters, conclusions, scientific contributions, a complete bibliography of Toma Katsori, a bibliography of other scientific sources used and two appendices in a volume of 255 pages. The bibliography of the creative heritage of Toma Katsori includes 163 units, other cited bibliography – 129 units, a total of 292 units. Appendix 1 contains a summary translation of the novel "The Bravest Warrior of Albania, Skanderbeg", and Appendix 2 contains a list of film translations made by T. Katsori. Even the work on the bibliographic units of the literary heritage of Toma Katsori alone makes the dissertation a contribution because it contains a corpus of valuable scientific

data for Albanology and Balkan studies, which can be used in the research work of scientists from various fields.

The structure of the dissertation is logical and consistent. The desire to gradually cover the diverse cultural activities of Toma Katsori, who as a "late revivalist" has erudite inclinations - he teaches, compiles a fundamental dictionary for Bulgarian-Albanian studies (Bulgarian-Albanian Dictionary. T. Katsori, T. Tartari, L. Dusha, S. Pasko, L. Grabocka, edited by Acad. Vl. Georgiev and R. Mutafchiev. BAS Edition. Sofia, 1959. 888 p.), becomes a gifted writer. With his position as a significant intellectual in Bulgarian cultural life during the socialist era, and even after that, he contributes to the creation of valuable first-person contact (and not mediated) with the intriguing language and culture of the small and unknown to the world in those years Albania. Katsori's work is worthy, and therefore it is especially commendable that the topic and content of the dissertation gravitate both around tradition and around the modern reading of the philological merits of Katsori's work. In this meeting of past and present, the research of prof. Stancheva ("Meeting in Reading. Comparative Literary Studies and Balkan Studies", Sofia, 2011. The collections under her supervision "The Great Entry or What Compares Comparative Literary Studies", Sofia, 2010 and "Migrant Cultures and Social Practices", Sofia, 2013) and the analysis of Katsori's work through the prism of the theory of migration practices were particularly useful.

The first chapter of the dissertation contains a methodological and biographical part, systematically describing the steps taken by the researcher, as well as some of the difficulties encountered by such works. Data on the Albanian colony in Bulgaria can be found in periodicals, as well as in personal archives, as is the case with the research on the works of T. Kacori. The researcher works precisely with the personal family archive of the Kacori family, which makes her discoveries valuable. L. Beyleri's studies are also related to a previously published monograph in Albanian Shkrimtari shqiptar Thoma Kacori në Bullgaria: Jeta dhe vepra (1922–2008). Sofia: Faculty of Slavic Studies of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, 2022. http://unilib-dspace.nasledstvo.bg/xmlui/handle/nls/35733 (2022), which partially precedes the dissertation. She is the author of the first chapter – "An Attempt at a Biography of Toma Katsori", the third chapter – "The Writer's Artistic Inspiration", the fourth chapter – "The Short Prose of Toma Katsori and the Important Phenomena for Ethnopsychology", the fifth chapter – "The Long Prose of Toma Katsori and the Natural History of the Albanians", the full bibliography of the writer and the summary in English.

The first chapter of the dissertation very clearly outlines the tasks set in a total of seven thematic areas: specifying the known facts from the biography of Toma Katsori through

documents and materials; tracing the activities of Toma Katsori as a continuation of the Albanian Revival societies in Bulgaria and specifying his contribution to their popularization; getting acquainted with the position of Toma Katsori on the important issues of linguistics, literature and culture in the Balkans and with his contribution to the debate on them; literary analysis of the litarary heritage; searching for and compiling a complete bibliography of the author's creative heritage. All of them have been successfully implemented during the dissertation, and we should give due credit to the stable structure, consistency in the creative analysis, striving for argumentation and scientific precision. The scientific methods used in the study are explicitly formulated and systematically applied. The work does not deviate from the goals and fully uses empirical, scientific-historical, literary-historical, and comparative literary methods.

Chapter two outlines essential aspects of the work of Toma Kacori as a compiler of a dictionary, which is still used as a basic tool by students of the Albanian language in Bulgaria (it was published in 1959, and the popular name of this dictionary in the country and abroad is "Kacori's Dictionary", as is clear from the text of the dissertation). T. Kacori was the first lecturer at the lectorate, opened in 1962 at the Department of General and Comparative Linguistics under the leadership of Prof. Vladimir Georgiev. This informative part of the dissertation contains data on the article in Albanian, in which Kacori presents details of the activities of the lectorate (Kacori, Thoma. Historia dhe aktiviteti i lektoratit të gjuhës shqipe në Universitetin e Sofjes deri më 1982. Në: Ndriçime. Shkup, 2000, f. 142–144). Undoubtedly, this lectorate serves as one of the foundations for the academic development of the Balkan Studies major and supports the presence of the Albanian language, as one of the four languages of the BLU (Balkan Language Union), in the program of the major. These facts are well summarized and presented in detail in the dissertation, which would also serve as a support for future archival and historical references together with the book dedicated to Katsori's work. Katsori's scientific articles (co-authored with P. Asenova and U. Dukova), his own article dedicated to the Bulgarian-Albanian dictionary from 1864, found in the Hilendar monastery (Linguistique Balkanique, No. 4, 1984, pp. 35–53), the book "Albania. Close and Unknown" from 1998, published in co-authorship with Bobi Bobev as a reading aimed at the wide public, are steps on the worthy path along which Katsori's scientific and life interests move, steps fascinatingly presented on the pages of the dissertation.

We encounter a genuine literary analysis in chapters three and four. Chapter three focuses on the different genres in which Katsori works – short stories, similar in theme to biographical literature, but also to the discoveries of Paleobalkan studies, and fables. The author

analyzes the different artistic genres and concludes that he takes a step from a scientist to a writer, transforming individual well-known historical episodes into his own literary plots of short stories and literary portraits. This approach is particularly characteristic of the collection "De Rada's Lamp" (1996). Katsori also wrote travelogues and reports that found a place in different medias, reflecting his impressions of his visits to Italy, Albania, and Romania.

Points of contact with prominent Albanian authors (classics Andon Zako Chayupi, Ndre Mieda, also Mitrush Kuteli) on the topic of emigration from Albanian villages were sought. It becomes clear that the personal life experience of Katsori, who spent his childhood in the Korca region, is the basis of many of the stories dedicated to the Albanian village, and in the social element and interest in the life of the poor villager, parallels with the work of Elin Pelin emerge. The descriptions of animals and their habits strengthen this impression. With the collection "Generations" (1962), Katsori leaves behind a picture of a bygone world, filled with human anxieties, pains and joys that brought together Balkan societies from the first half of the 20th century.

This chapter also contains one of the particularly interesting finds in the Katsori archive. The collection "Ancient Stories"[1], which remains unpublished in Bulgarian, although the texts were prepared by the author himself. Among the practical tasks of the dissertation is to publish these stories in an electronic version. The era of the early 1980s in Bulgaria is rich in Paleo-Balkan finds, therefore such a theme is consonant with the latest cultural discoveries of the time.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the two great epic canvases created by the writer-historiographer. Firstly, the novel "The Bravest Warrior of Albania Skanderbeg" is examined. It was published in Albanian in 2005 on the 600th anniversary of the birth of the Albanian national hero Georgi Kastrioti Skanderbeg, and was prepared in manuscript in Bulgarian too with the idea of finding its publisher. The novel is defined as a historical saga in which the historical epic prevails, and the fictional unfolds in the background in symbiosis with ethnographic references. Elements of the four cultures that shaped the appearance of the Albania in this era are intertwined in the plot of the novel - Ottoman, Byzantine, Albanian and Venetian. The theme of honor is present as a leading moral and ethical norm, which also finds stylistic expression in the antithetical structuring of the figurative tools, divided between black and white contrasts. This type of construction is also related to the characteristic phraseologism "faqebardhë". In Katsori's more famous historical novel "The Great Besa" (1960), published

[1] Kacori, Thoma. *Tregime të moçme*. Tetovë: Ars media klub, 2005, 175 f.

in Bulgarian, the motif of the besa occupies a central place as an element of the generally valid public communication code throughout the centuries, but also as an essential auto-imagological sign through which Katsori declares his belonging to the Albanian community, for which the given word has a sacred meaning. The original title of the work is “Për mëmëdhenë” (“For the Homeland”), and the dissertation draws a parallel between Katsori’s novel and Vazov’s “Under the Yoke” based on their patriotic themes.

The fifth chapter is particularly useful. There the thematic fields of Katsori's work are formulated from the standpoint of imagology, illustrated with examples from specific works - the Albanian and the weapon; money and morals; beliefs, sacred places and saints (where the intertwining between the mystical-religious and the everyday-traditional in Katsori's worldview is highlighted).

“Late Revivalist” is an excellently justified definition of the personality and work of the intellectual Katsori. The conclusions systematically summarize the large amount of scientific data, presented in a fascinating and comprehensive manner.

The work is characterized by a high level of factuality and density of scientific summaries. The doctoral candidate has a sufficient number of publications exceeding the requirements for the respective educational degree.

I consider Liliana Beyleri’s dissertation to be distributable and I fully support the award of the scientific and educational degree “doctor” to the doctoral candidate Liliana Beyleri in Professional field: 2.1. Philology; scientific specialty: Literature of the peoples of Europe, America, Asia, Africa and Australia (Albanian literature).

25.04.2025 Assoc. Prof. Dr. F. Christakoudi-Konstantinidou