

OPINION

for the dissertation of Plamena Georgieva Kostova

on the topic:

THE DORMITION OF ST. JOHN THE THEOLOGIAN (BHG 916) IN THE SOUTH
SLAVIC TRADITION. TEXT AND CONTEXT

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

in the professional field 2.1. "Philology"

(Bulgarian Literature. Medieval Bulgarian Literature)

Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Klementina Ilieva Ivanova

This opinion is prepared based on the dissertation which was discussed and directed for public defense at a meeting of the Cyrillo-Methodian Department at the Faculty of Slavic Philology on January 20, 2023. The meeting stated that the requirements of the Internal Regulations for the development of the academic staff at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" have been met, and according to them, Plamena Kostova has completed the activities of her educational program, successfully passed the exams specified in the individual study plan, and has presented her dissertation. Plamena Kostova has graduated in the specialty "Bulgarian Philology" with a degree in "Master of Old Bulgarian Studies" and was a doctoral student in Bulgarian Medieval Literature at the Cyrillo-Methodian Department (2019-2022). Her scientific advisor is Assoc. Prof. Dr. Diana Atanasova-Pencheva. During her doctoral studies (2020-2021), she was a part time assistant professor in "Old Bulgarian Literature" at the Department, and since 2022, she has been an assistant-professor at the Institute of Literature at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Section "Old Bulgarian Literature." She has participated in research projects and in more than seven national and international scientific forums, conferences, and seminars. With the text for review, the doctoral student has submitted an abstract (23 pages), which accurately reflects her work, as well as 6 independent publications on the topic of the dissertation in scientific journals (4 published and 2 under review).

The topic of the dissertation is the Old Bulgarian translation of a Greek text about the Apostle John the Theologian, spread in South Slavic milieu. The so called "Dormition of the Apostle John the Theologian" is an early and voluminous narrative dedicated to a New Testament figure. The "Dormition" belongs to the group of apocryphal texts, but at the same time (like other acts/martyrdoms), it was written and perceived as a canonical hagiographic text to commemorate the apostle. Its reception is defined by the canonical regulations for readings, mainly in monastic worship, and its main place is in the Menologia. Therefore, rightfully, in her dissertation, Plamena Kostova includes the witnesses of the translation found in this type of collections, specifically in the South Slavic milieu. The translation is known in seven copies from Menologia, one of which is only fragmentarily preserved. Undoubtedly, the Old Bulgarian translation was made early and has reached us in manuscript dated from the 14th century onwards. So far, the "Dormition" has not been thoroughly researched. The doctoral student has set herself the ambitious goal of studying the translation based on its six witnesses as comprehensively as possible, using a complex philological approach, interpreting it from a literary perspective, and editing the text in its three redactions.

The dissertation consists of 192 pages, and with the text editions (210 pages) and bibliography, it totals 421 pages. It is structured into an introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion. The composition is well thought out and corresponds to the content. Chapter I covers the history of the cult of the Apostle and its appearance in Byzantium and among the South Slavs. Here, it would be appropriate to introduce the principles of its transmission when the first Slavic text is mentioned on page 16. In Chapter II, the use of Erhard's research on Greek transcriptions is a crucial point, and it is also commendable that attention is paid to the Damascene manuscript tradition. Presenting the content of the "Dormition" in episodes is necessary and relevant to the dissertation. However, I believe that the final formulation of this chapter, describing the "Achievements" as an apocryphal text that "overcame" the Church's prohibition, does not accurately reflect its place in the South Slavic repertoire. The position of all texts about the apostles in the South Slavic canonical books is evidence of this. Chapter III, pointed by Plamena Kostova as the main one, demonstrates her desire to analyze the narrative of the "Dormition" as influenced by ancient literature such as Homer's epics or folklore (magical tales). However, the main task cannot be to trace elements that are not characteristic of hagiography! I will not comment on this

part, especially the connection between the "Iliad" and the "Dormition." The main task should be the analysis of hagiographic motifs, biblical references in the "Dormition" (chapters IV and V), as well as the textual analyses for each of the redactions (Chapter VI). Together with the appendix, they represent a good demonstration of the doctoral student's scholarly potential. Unfortunately, there is no real conclusion with a summary and conclusions, and the chapter summaries do not provide a suitable overview.

The dissertation is a good philological approach to the translation of "The Dormition of St. John the Theologian" into Old Bulgarian. In her research, Plamena Kostova demonstrates a solid grasp of the necessary knowledge in the field of Old Bulgarian literature. She has a scholarly approach, knowledge of medieval manuscripts, and interest in literary history. Considering the translational nature of the text, Plamena shows that she is capable of handling it and will undoubtedly continue to study the Greek language to further enhance the textual analysis of Old Bulgarian translations. Even as a master's student, she displayed a thirst for knowledge, correctness, thoroughness, and a particular interest in medieval literary history. I must emphasize her desire to give her best, which was particularly evident in the final stages of her work on the dissertation. During the eternal defense (on January 20th 2023), colleagues appreciated her effort, but also provided critical remarks, including comments on the volume (883 pages), composition, and several specific recommendations. In the three months that she had to edit her dissertation, Plamena considered the most important of these recommendations. She put in a lot of effort and took great care to reorganize certain parts, condensed others, introduce appropriate tables, balance the structure of her work, make necessary additions, clarifications, or changes, and so on. As a result, the work gained a lot.

The dissertation of Plamena Kostova contains scholarly results and edited texts which are contributions to the study of translated lives/acts of apostolic type. The work demonstrates that the doctoral student possesses knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty of "Medieval Bulgarian Literature." The colleague has researched a vast amount of scholarly literature, acquired proficiency in the Greek language to read the texts and drawing parallels with Slavic translations. She is adept in archival research and skillfully reads and transcribes medieval texts. I would especially note the excellent supervision of Assoc. Prof. Diana Atanasova, from whom Plamena received scholarly assistance and support throughout all stages of her research work.

I give a positive assessment of the achieved results and contributions presented in the reviewed dissertation, abstract, and publications, and I wish Plamena Kostova to continue this research and to publish it as a book.

And I will vote with conviction for awarding Plamena Georgieva Kostova the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor".

15.05.2023

Sofia

Prof. Dr. Klimentina Ivanova