

REVIEW

by Prof. DSc. VASYA NIKOLOVA VELINOVA

for the dissertation of

PLAMENA GEORGIEVA KOSTOVA on topic

"THE DORMITION OF ST. JOHN THE THEOLOGOS [ACTS OF JOHN] (BHG 916) IN
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OLD BULGARIAN LITERATURE

Plamena Georgieva Kostova's dissertation is dedicated to a poorly studied work that has so far remained outside the serious interest of literary medieval studies. This is the Dormition of St. John the Theologian (also defined as *Prostanno zhitije*, *Hozhdenie*, etc.) a translated work known in the South Slavic tradition in a relatively large number of copies, placed mainly in four-month collections or calendar collections. The Dormition of John the Theologian is a work with a complex textual history both on Greek soil and in a South Slavic environment.

The work probably arose on the basis of older church traditions, but was not tolerated by the official church. In a Slavic tradition, the reworked version attributed to the disciple of Ev. John - Prochorus, one of the seventy apostles is attested. The peculiarities of the language of the Slavic translation, as well as the fact that the work is found in the miscellanies with fixed content mostly accompanied by pre-Metaphrastian hagiographic texts, has given researchers the reason to accept the hypothesis of its appearance already in the Old Bulgarian era, without the text of the Dormition being independently researched. On South Slavic soil, its tradition is also not uniform, there are at least three versions in the stable compositions, and probably two translations exist - the one already mentioned from the 10th century and a second one, which enters the Damascene collections as a non-Damascene work.

All these circumstances turn the scientific task of Plamena Kostova's doctorate into a very serious test for a young researcher and place before her a number of serious requirements - both in terms of linguistic-textological and literary analysis. The doctoral student had to work with a quasi-canonical translated work, which in itself is already a complex problem, at least as far as the contextualization of the work is concerned, already stated in the title of Plamena

Kostova's work. It is beyond doubt that the scientific task set in the dissertation - a comprehensive analysis of the work (archaeographic and textological research combined with its literary interpretation) - to a certain extent exceeds the standard requirements for a doctoral student. On the other hand, however, this gives the author the opportunity to independently determine her methodology of analysis, to look for more non-standard criteria for the classification of the literary facts she comes across. In practice, she is given greater freedom of interpretation of this quasi-canonical, pre-Metaphrastian hagiographical text.

It is indisputable that the doctoral student has made very serious efforts to fully present all dimensions of the scientific problem put before her. The structure of the work and the intentions stated in the individual parts to clarify all important aspects of the reception of the Greek text and its structure, literary characteristics and liturgical functionality speak for this. The dissertation, in a volume of 421 pages, contains two parts: Research (pp. 3-193) and Appendix (pp. 194-404). At the end (pp. 405-421) there is a bibliography. The study is structured in an introduction and six chapters, each of which is devoted to different aspects of text analysis.

In the introduction, the main goals and objectives of the dissertation work are considered, the methodology of the research is determined and its structure is motivated. The introduction is concise and accurate, the author clearly formulates the main goals and the tasks that must be solved to achieve them. The methodology used is also well-founded.

In the first chapter, the researcher Plamena Kostova examines the problem of the cult of St. John the Theologian and the texts existing in a South Slavic environment she identified. The chapter contains a main part on the cult and three sub-chapters: an overview of the works on St. John the Theologian in the Byzantine and Slavic traditions respectively, and the third section is devoted to the synaxar readings. The presentation of the cult of St. John the Theologian is perhaps the most important factor of the context, because it conditions the writing of the works about the saint. Without it they would not exist. In this sense, the analysis affects both the cultural-historical context of the formation of the cult of this perhaps most famous disciple of Christ, evangelist and apostle, as well as the specifically literary context of the creation and function of the texts that serve him. Plamena Kostova has tried to present all types of manuscripts that contain information about the church calendar, resp. about the celebrating the memory of Christian saints.

She begins her analysis from the early hagiographic information, cites various testimonies from early pilgrimage descriptions (Egeria, the abbot Danil), reviews the ancient synaxaries, as well

as a serious array of Slavic monuments with calendrical messages - Gospel monthly addresses and monthly addresses in the apostles. Thus the reader is presented with a widely documented cult. Along with the honoring of St. John the Theologian on holidays, when collective honor is paid to the apostles, the two dates on which the saint is honored individually are presented and commented on - September 26, the day of his Dormition and May 8 - the day when from the grave of the saint comes out healing pollen. In addition to both being presented in the South Slavic tradition, one of the transcripts that the author further analyzes, Hill. 431, is placed under that date. So she aptly introduces this major factor of context.

In the next section of the first chapter, the Greek writings about the saint are presented. This is more about statistics, since existing works are only listed. A little more information is given about those that underlie the translation of the Dormition. This is understandable, since the analysis of Greek writings is not the author's priority, but perhaps some summary of the diversity in the Greek tradition and of the authors who left their works for St. John the Theologian would give a more complete look to this section. The second section of the first chapter dwells on the Slavic works about the Evangelist John. Transcripts of the Dormition included in the calendar collections are listed here as they are systematized in the BHBS, but the author does not comment. Perhaps here too it would be appropriate to offer some conclusion about the diversity that the Greek tradition demonstrates to us compared to the limited number of translated texts in South Slavic. It would also be interesting to draw the reader's attention to the fact that the South Slavic tradition, regardless of the statutory prescriptions, adheres to an work from the old redaction that was in use even until the 16th century, when the copy in Hill. 431. A work by Simeon Metaphrastus is presented quite fragmentarily in the tradition in Cet.50 from the 13th century.

As a plus for outlining the context of the Dormition, I would point out the author's desire to present all available works about St. John the Theologian, incl. the work of John the Exarch. However, it is, inappropriately placed among the Byzantine texts, and secondly, the authorship of John the Exarch is incorrectly doubted, since his name appears in the title of the work (see p. 13 of the dissertation and BHBS 4, 227). Its place is in the section with Slavic works as an original work of an Old Bulgarian scribe.

The section on the Damascene tradition completes the picture of the spread of the Dormition of St. John the Theologian with the second translation, probably made in the 17th century, but it is unrelated to the first and has no influence on its textual tradition.

The second chapter is devoted to the content of the Dormition of John the Theologian. First, the doctoral student presents the content of the work by episodes - 31 in total. They undoubtedly facilitate the reader, but it is not clear what are the criteria by which they are distinguished - whether these are instructions in the text itself, whether they find support in the edition of the Greek text or whether they are meaningfully distinguished by the author of the dissertation. In any case, this is an important detail, because the researcher herself notes that the numbering of the episodes will be used in all subsequent references.

In the section devoted to the history of the text, Plamena Kostova has made a comprehensive review of the existing scientific opinions regarding the time and place of writing the biography, as well as its author. The information is presented clearly and concisely, this part is well structured and contributes greatly to clarifying not only the history of the text, but also its nature as a quasi-canonical work, the legitimacy of which has been disputed by the church. In addition, the author has proposed her hypothesis regarding the time appearance of the work, which is well-founded and logical. This is undoubtedly a contributing point in the work. The history of text studies, a section mandatory for the doctoral dissertation as a scientific genre, is well presented, various hypotheses are commented on, which are not so numerous. Here, the doctoral student shows a very good awareness of the main works and individual studies devoted to the work she is analyzing. An interesting fact is the quoted opinion (of Vinogradov) that Prokhor's name is used as a pseudo-epigraph in the work. Plamena Kostova pays more attention to Zahn's hypothesis, who mainly analyzes the content, highlighting real borrowings from the Acts of the Apostles and various fictitious events, places and people through which the author of the life tried to create a new and different account of the evangelist John (p .30-32).

In fact, these conclusions are a solid basis for the doctoral student's further reflections on the ways of constructing a narrative, analyzed by her in the following parts of the dissertation. But I would also like to direct her attention to the hypothesis of the "imaginary" Prokhor, what she cites as Vinogradov's opinion. The search for the fictitious, "invented" hagiographic character - whether he was an author or a participant in the events - is currently an interesting and fruitful direction in the study of Byzantine hagiography. Already Kazhdan, in his 1987 study of Constantine the Great, notes the ability of Byzantine hagiography to create "imaginary" images - either completely fictitious or "remodeled" real historical characters. Recently, several collections of scholarly forums devoted to "Constructing Saints" have been published. Their experience could be used by Plamena Kostova in the analysis of the central character - St. John the Theologian, as well as in the presentation of the author - Prokhor, provided that the

authorship is approached as pseudo-epigraphic. Of course, these are only advisory notes to outline for the researcher different ways of literary analysis. She herself, in the following parts of the work, tried to offer her own original readings of the narrative techniques.

I want to emphasize that these two sections - the analysis of the history of the study and the presentation of the work in the Byzantine tradition and the quatrefoil compositions are thoroughly presented. Here, the dissertation student demonstrates good awareness and skill in interpreting scientific sources. She has systematized the information provided by Ehrhard in his classic study and has subordinated all her conclusions to her main task - to explain how the work fits into the Slavic literary tradition, although her conclusion is laconic: "The narrative exists in two types of calendar collections - panegyric martyrologies and menologies. The readings are placed under the date of September 26, and rarely do manuscripts contain a second text about the apostle. In the cases in which it is present it is a eulogy most often attributed to John Chrysostom. It is noteworthy that the Dormition "walks next door" to two groups of hagiographic works - (1) after the Passion of Thecla and before the Passion of Thomas, Ananias, Cyprian and Justin, Hypatius the Wonderworker and (2) after the Life of Euphrosyne and before the Life of Cyriacus , Passion of Ananias and Passion of Cyprian and Justina.

The overview made of the Greek context in which the Dormition of St. John the Theologian was distributed is important, because through it we could not only trace the path of the narrative of John from a Byzantine to a Slavic environment, but also see the history of the text in a specific type of collections, in which it is placed." (p. 43).

The dissertation student tried to solve this task in the next section, where the transcripts of the Dormition used by her are presented. There are a total of 6 of them, and only the transcript from the Romanian National Academy of Sciences - BRAN 24.4.18 was not used, most likely due to its fragmentary nature. This too could have been explained in one sentence when presenting the transcripts. Also, on p. 49, the signature should be corrected - it is about Hill. 431, not as it says - 432. This signature should be well followed throughout the dissertation, because in some places it is also found as 341 - see pp. 137-139. This is a technical detail, but serious misunderstandings can arise when it comes to the signature of a manuscript.

The conclusions drawn by the author based on the review of the transcripts are interesting, substantiated and point to some specifics of the text - pre-metaphrast type of work, apocryphal text penetrated into a canonical environment, stable manuscript tradition. These features are analyzed in more detail in the next section of the second chapter - Structure of the Dormition.

The analysis made in this chapter is based on the theoretical propositions derived by Kr. Stanchev in his book "Poetics of Old Bulgarian Literature". The author steps on the compositional structure of the canonical extensive life proposed by Stanchev and makes a comparative analysis of each of the separate compositional sections. The analyzes are supported by well-chosen examples from the text, which clearly show the differences between the pre-Metaphrastian type of work and the lives built in the Metaphrastian canon. The conclusions on p. 58, I quote: "...the Dormition of St. John the Theologian lacks the rhetorical parts as well as the fable exposition that introduces us to the hero. We could define this, on the one hand, as a deviation from the fabled structure of the hagiographic work. On the other hand, the absence of these parts could be connected with the early appearance of the text..." is important because it implicitly grounds the further analysis of the narrative features of the Dormition made in chapter three.

The third chapter of the work contains the most original author's ideas, implemented in order to show the literary context in which this work, which originated early in Byzantium, existed - Dormition of John the Theologian. Presenting some theoretical statements regarding the concept of "genre" in the Middle Ages (Stanchev, Izmirlieva, Ingham), the author chooses to apply Ingham's methodology. To it I add the observations of A. Naumov, due to the specific quasi-canonical nature of the work, since with Ingham the canonicity, resp. the non-canonicity of the work is not a relevant sign. The analysis then goes into the field of the novel beginning, where rather artificially an attempt is made to justify and apply the term romance instead of the novel accepted in literary theory. It is not clear what this term enriches the research with, especially since the opinions and theoretical positions of authors (Freidenberg, Bachtin, Bogdanov) who adhere to the classical concept related to the literary epic are then cited. The term romance, however temptingly modern, misleads the reader, because according to our literary terminology it has another specific meaning.

In this sense, the new term does not enrich the study, because it contradicts the subsequent reasoning of the author, among interesting and well-argued ones, which lead only to parallels with ancient novels and the concepts of the epic narrative in general. The main part of this section is devoted to the Homeric epic and the poem *Odyssey*, which could hardly be classified under the genre classification of romance.

Thus we come to a very important moment of Plamena Kostova's analyses. This is the comparison between the *Odyssey* and the Dormition. Choosing as the starting point of her reasoning B. Bogdanov's statement about "Romance" as a concept and narrative feature (p. 66)

of Homer's poem, the dissertation researcher finds the same "Romance" in the Dormition. She gives five "iconic examples": Wandering the World, Sea Tempest, Fairy Salvation, Captivity and Dungeon, and Seeming Death, defined either as narrative elements, as episodes, as similitudes, which is quite confusing for the reader, as literary phenomena of different order - some affect the plot, others the fable, and in my opinion, here the terminology, as well as the criteria for distinguishing the individual elements of the narrative, should be specified, because some of the examples can be transferred to the next section - topos. In general, this experience of Plamena Kostova can be defined as contributing to the attempt to contextualize the work analyzed by her. However, some stipulations must also be made about the mechanisms of the appearance of these similarities - typological or analogical given the early appearance of the work in the era of the late Hellenistic literary tradition. The attempt of a young researcher to look for original and non-standard solutions in the approach to the analysis of the poetics of a work that does not fit into the traditional medieval genre model is gratifying, and the efforts and results reached by Plamena Kostova deserve to be appreciated.

The analysis of the Dormition of St. John the Theologian continues using another, equally adequate, approach – as an analysis of a fairy tale according to the methodology of Prop. The dissertation student selects 14 features of the fairy tale character and makes comparisons with the text of the medieval Christian work to find a number of coincidences. This is how she motivated her main conclusion: "From the observations made, we can conclude that the Dormition of St. John the Theologian is made up of archaic elements found in pre-Christian texts. Among the devices used in the narrative, one can recognize those that are typical of ancient romance and patterns characteristic of fairy-tale creation.

In the next chapter, the hagiographic mode of construction of the work is presented. It analyzes two groups of motifs - motifs-topos and wandering motifs. Here, too, the doctoral student has shown a good philological awareness of the methodology of deriving the topos and the dissemination of wandering motifs. She has compared them with other similar cases of use in medieval Slavic texts - translations and originals, in order to emphasize my great role in the overall construction of the narrative. Within the whole, this chapter is the most robust terminologically and methodologically and shows the author's possibilities for a deep independent literary analysis of the medieval text with its multiple meanings, symbolic load and allegorical statement. With this chapter, the literary analysis of the Dormition acquires a more complete and complete look, and undoubtedly this analysis is Plamena Kostova's contribution to the study of this interesting and difficult to interpret work.

In the next, fifth chapter, the doctoral student presented the biblical quotations and reminiscences in the text. 5 exact quotations and several paraphrases have been identified. The contribution here is not only in the identification of the quotations, but in the successful attempt to interpret their theological meaning and their role in building the overall Christian spirit of the work. Plamena Kostova, based on practically verified theoretical statements about the meaning of the biblical quotation in the author's text, has expanded and deepened the analysis of the quotations, showing that they in a certain sense structure the narrative itself, and this is undoubtedly also a contribution.

The sixth chapter is devoted to the textual study of the text. The author follows what was done by Cl. Ivanov's systematization of three editions of the text, pointing out that the differences between the individual editions are minor and are rather the result of the long scribal tradition than of conscious editorial intervention. She distinguishes two subgroups in the first group of examined transcripts, which undoubtedly brings some clarity to the picture of translation's existence. My general recommendation for this part is to re-examine the Greek text where there are missing letters, mechanical typos. Also, some of the inferences about proximity, resp. discrepancies between versions undergo some refinement or reexamination and interpretation. This mainly affects the first examples, which are also more voluminous. The conclusion of this chapter is that during the Middle Ages some translations existed with minor changes in the texts.

What is missing in this chapter? It should be said a little more about the translation techniques and solutions, to summarize at least in one paragraph the style of the translation - what has been said is too minimalistic and does not give an accurate idea of the translation approach to a text translated in the Old Bulgarian era. Perhaps in her future studies, the researcher will fill this gap, because this is an important requirement when presenting a translated text such as the Dormition.

The appendix presents all three editions of the work. For the needs of the dissertation and for its readers, it is probably necessary. But I think that at some future stage it should be reconsidered as a critical edition.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that Plamena Kostova successfully coped with the tasks formulated in the introduction of her dissertation work. Some aspects of the character of the Greek transcripts remain unclear - are there any indications for the individual episodes, how the versions in the Greek text relate to each other. The doctoral student herself notes that even

the identification of the Greek text as No. 916 of the BHG is questionable. Then a number of stipulations should be made to the conclusions made in the text, which are missing. On the other hand, with such a complex textual history, the author has very successfully chosen her approach to the analysis of the text in an effort to explain its quasi-canonical nature. The table presented at the end with the distribution of episodes in the individual transcripts also contributes to greater clarity in understanding the history of the text.

taking into account the initially discussed option and what Plamena Kostova did after the recommendations given to her at the discussion, I think that she has the potential to work successfully with a medieval text, to present it analytically and to outline the different semantic and functional fields in which it is realized. I also think, however, that in this form the work could not be issued. It meets the conditions for a successful defense, but before its publication it needs serious revision - editorial, proofreading, review of the Greek and Slavic examples, addition of some theoretical points and considerations, which I have already mentioned, refinement of the textual part. The notes and recommendations made by me do not detract from the results of the dissertation work and the achievements of Plamena Kostova. They are made for the sole purpose of making the work even more complete in order to receive an adequate evaluation, given the efforts made by the researcher and the original ideas, hypotheses and observations proposed.

The submitted abstract meets the requirements, faithfully and accurately reflects both the goals and tasks of the dissertation, as well as the achieved contribution results. The dissertation student prepared the necessary number of publications, even more than the requirements, participated in the preparation of scientific forums and scientific collections, which is also a good school for working with medieval literature.

Bearing in mind what has been said so far, what Plamena Kostova has achieved and the requirements for a dissertation in the educational and scientific degree "doctor", I propose to the honorable jury to award the doctoral student Plamena Georgieva Kostova the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

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Prof. DSc Vasya Velinova