

OPINION

by Professor Dr. Margaret Dimitrova

for the doctoral dissertation by Tatjana Braga entitled

„Одеските дамаскини от сбирката на В. И. Григорович – част от българското културно-историческо наследство. Палеография, кодикология, датировка“ [Odessa Damaskins in the collection of V. I. Grigorovich – part of the Bulgarian cultural-historical legacy. Paleography, codicology, and dating]

The dissertation is dedicated to an important question of the history of Bulgarian literature and letters: it analyses manuscripts kept in Odessa National Library that are poorly studied and are not largely known in scholarship. This topic is both important and difficult because each of the four manuscripts focused on has its own specifics in terms of its codicological features and contents. They originate from different places and time and have different provenience. I would like to underline that the diverse Bulgarian handwritten sources of the eighteenth century are poorly studied, the overall picture is not clearly described and evaluated and there is not even a uniform and consistent academic terminology with which to describe the peculiarities of the manuscripts of this century. Therefore, the analysis of every manuscript from this period is a contribution to the elucidation of the interests, knowledge, preferences, and abilities of the literate Bulgarians of that time.

The four manuscripts examined by T. Braga pose many research questions. I find relevant her approach to start studying them with the examination of their codicological features and with description of their content and provenance, juxtaposing various data and placing the emphasis on comparison with dated and localised manuscripts. T. Braga clearly formulated her goals and tasks in the opening part of her dissertation and in my judgement, she accomplished what she stated there.

A common feature of the dissertation is that before discussing particular questions related to the manuscripts examined, the author draws a broad picture of the main issues in the academic fields in which these questions lie. In several cases, this is a good approach because she contextualizes her findings in academic disputes and searches and this helps her find proper methods of her own research. It is good that she regularly expresses her

understanding and position in cases of different or contradicting scholarly opinions, for instance on the beginning of the modern Bulgarian standard language (part 1.6). In other cases, however, the overview of the previous research is too broad and does not refer directly to the particular tasks of the dissertation.

The review of the research on damaskins in the opening chapter is necessary and it makes a good impression because it takes into account both recent publications and much earlier ones. I value the second chapter too since it carefully traces back the information relevant to the Odessa manuscripts studied.

The main contributions of this dissertation are in the third chapter and in the 4.2. The author juxtaposes various types of information in order to find out when and where these four manuscripts were written and later used. Here, I cannot discuss all of the findings of Braga that deserve admiration and I will mention only some of them. For instance, she identified the manner of writing of Odessa 36 as belonging to the Karlovo calligraphic center and to be very close to the handwriting of the prolific scribe Avram Dimitrievich. Further, she found out that Odessa 37 has never been in the mythical place “Poshekhonja” and that it was found by Grigorovich in Zograf Monastery (at Mount Athos) where it was brought earlier from Kotel region. In a good professional manner, she described Odessa 38. I agree with her that it is likely that the second part of this manuscript was copied by Grigor Popiliovich but this assumption needs to be proven with more arguments. I do not think that the third part of this manuscript could be entitled “Празници бабини или о бабињх баснењх“ [Old grannies’ feasts or on old grannies’ tales]. I believe that this is the title only of the first sermon. Indeed, the expected word “slovo” [sermon] is missing in Odessa 38 but it appears in another copy of the same text in manuscript no. 324 housed in Sts. Cyril and Methodius National Library in Sofia. I would prefer the titles *Sbornik for Women* suggested by Bonju Angelov („Женски сборник“ or „Женска част“ (Д. Петканова) – this title is also used by Braga.

The biggest part of the fourth chapter is dedicated to the lexis of the texts copied in the four manuscripts studied. It is a good choice to compare it with the existing dictionary of the seventeenth-century Tikhonravov Damaskin (a significant contribution to the study of modern Bulgarian damaskins). T. Braga outlines several lexemes culled from Odessa manuscripts that are not present in this dictionary and correctly explains that they are used in texts in Odessa manuscripts that were not present in the Tikhonravov Damaskin. Another explanation Braga finds in the assumption that several new lexemes were included in the eighteenth-century source in comparison with the seventeenth-century damaskins. This explanation awaits further detailed analysis that should be based on textological comparisons

of different versions of the same text. At this stage of research of damaskins in scholarship this is not possible, especially for the eighteenth-century sources, which, in general, are poorly studied, including their lexis. This makes Braga's observations particularly valuable.

An obstacle in the work of Braga is the lack of a big dictionary of the Bulgarian dialects and of the eighteenth century homiletic literature. The semantics of the words included in the Bulgarian etymological dictionary is not represented in detail which is expected for such type of a dictionary. In spite of that, Braga managed to formulate the meanings of the lexemes that she discusses (for instance, I value her analysis of *бурен* and *биле*, the former used as a synonym of the latter in the sources under review in the dissertation).

Despite the difficulties, T. Braga managed to illustrate her observations and conclusions with elements of the manuscripts decoration and with samples of the texts in the appendices to the dissertation. She clearly states the principles chosen for the edition of the text – her typeset is as close as possible to the manuscript, including the word division and punctuation. I find this choice quite reasonable in this case because there are not photographs available. Therefore, she imitates the word division in the manuscripts that could shed light on the manner of reading, manner of pronunciation, and on the level of literacy.

After the pre-defence, T. Braga made several improvements of her dissertation. Nevertheless, some unclear statements and inconsistency remain. For instance, in the first chapter she correctly enumerates the different hypotheses about the place of origin of the most popular translation of the “Thesaurus” into archaic literary language: a place in Sredna, Rila Monastery, or Lovech Monastery “Jastreb”. Still, further she writes that in the seventeenth century two partial translations originate from the West-Bulgarian translation but she does not provide information on the manuscripts that contain this translation, neither specifies what she means under West-Bulgarian translation.

The bibliography is impressive but perhaps it could be expanded with more recent studies of manuscripts with which the author compares Odessa damaskins, such as the paper by Diana Ivanova characterizing manuscript 119 in the Ivan Vazov National Library in Plovdiv : „За един малко познат дамаскин от края на XVII век в ръкописната колекция на Народната библиотека „Иван Вазов“ Пловдив“ – **Сълав** IV, 2017, issue 7.

As a whole, the dissertation of Tatjana Braga is well written and demonstrates that the author knows very well relevant methods for examination of late manuscripts called in the seventeenth-nineteenth century written tradition “damaskini”. Her analyses of four manuscripts kept in Odessa National Library are a contribution to the study of scribal

practices and predilections of the early eighteenth century, a relatively poorly studied period of manuscript use and dissemination. Therefore, I will vote positively the academic degree “doctor of philosophy” to be awarded to Tatjana Braga

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