



Book review:

Христакуди, Фотини. Проблеми на гръцкия литературен развой 1880-1930. (Етюди върху новогръцката поезия). София, Ни плюс, 2020, 255 с.
[Christakoudy, Fotiny. Problems of Greek Literary Development 1880-1930. (Studies on Modern Greek Poetry). Sofia, Ni plus, 2020, 255 p.]

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The end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century is a period of the Balkan and the European history, nuanced by too many contradictory processes and events. For the recently revived Balkan countries, it could be characterized primarily as a time of emancipation and gaining a place both on the political stage of the European concert but in all other spheres of public life as well. In this process, the literature acquires the function of a mediator between East and West and an expression of the spirit of the respective period. Assoc. Prof. Fotiny Christakoudy examines the Greek poetic thought in her study “Problems of Greek Literary Development 1880-1930. (Studies on Modern Greek Poetry)”, offering the reader an in-depth scientific work, which at the same time seems to speak with the saturated discourse of the time.

The book traces the diffusion of new literary trends in Greek literary world not only diachronically, in the respective period, but also seeks the links with the centuries-old folklore tradition and its modern and modernist interpretation in the poetic works of the late 19th and early 20th century. This synchronous (in a European context) and diachronic (from Ancient Greece through Byzantium to the respective period) interpretation of the development of Greek poetic work allows the reader to

apprehend the whole and complete context. Besides, Assoc. Prof. Christakoudy approaches the poets themselves comparatively – not just their biographies and texts are presented, but the processes of interaction and impact, offering translations of some of their poems, not previously presented in Bulgarian.

Of course, in a monograph treating Balkan or any literature from the periphery, the question of the small literatures and their place in the European “literary concert” is invariable to be asked. The author answered the question by examining the personality and work of Jean Moréas and his Greek origins, noting the almost simultaneous appearance of symbolism in France with Moréas' Symbolist Manifesto from 1886 in the French newspaper *Le Figaro* and in Greece with the verses of S. Stefanu from 1892 (Christakoudy 2020: 57-58). However, two external, non-literary processes influenced the Greek literary development of the period under consideration, the place of which Assoc. Prof. Christakoudy explores in-depth, which complements the idea of the period under study with a look at the political and social situation. On the one hand, there is the question of language, and in particular, the Greek diglossia, expressed in the clash between the Katharevousa and Dimotiki, and on the other hand, stands the Megali Idea that embodies the desire to unite the Greek lands. The internal opposition of Dimotiki-Katharevousa also gives dynamism to the literary processes in the modernization of art. This clash represents the living, spoken language, which acquired an artistic function thanks to the poetic symbolists of the 1880s from the so-called New Athenian School («Νέα Αθηναϊκή Σχολή»): Drosinis, Nikolaos (Nikos) Kambas and Kostis Palamas, and the language of the state power, existing within certain frameworks.

Regarding the development of Megali Idea's place in poetry, as an example is given the work of Palamas, who, after the collapse of Greek aspirations following the Asia Minor catastrophe of 1922-1923, called on his compatriots to build the symbol of Christianity – the Church of Hagia Sophia – in their hearts, since it is outside the borders of Greece. Somehow, this reminder sounds very relevant today in a situation in which the temple has not only remained within the borders of a foreign country but also serves a foreign religion. Thus, along with the literary and cultural-historical, this study offers an interdisciplinary reading, which sounds topical, outlining processes, the echo of which is to be found in modern times as a reception of domestic and foreign policy pursued by the country.

In the afterword to the book, the author recalls Spengler's reasoning in his work “The Decline of the West” (1923) that if man's surrounding world is a vast collection of symbols, so should man himself, insofar as he belongs to the substance of the real, insofar as he is a phenomenon, to be involved in this symbolism (Spengler 1995: 360). What is evident in the study of Assoc. Prof. Christakoudy is the line of meaning that traces precisely this connection between poetry and reality, between man and

symbol, through which Greek poets of the period discuss the searches and aspirations of their time, doing so through the already mentioned question of Greek diglossia as well. At the centre of their work, the Greek Symbolists put the real problems of life, nation and language, dressed not in the weekday, but in the more beautiful poetic word.

The study's afterword offers as well a slightly unconventional but contemporary view of the issue through the geography of the peninsulas, noting that “as marginal geographical borders of Europe, both the Balkans and the Scandinavian peninsula have the privilege of being part of the whole, but also to differ from it in their way” (Christakoudy 2020: 243). This different view of the periphery through the analogy between two seemingly different physically and culturally regions is achieved through the attempt to “bring Esta Tsiganou and Thomas Tranströmer closer – two poets so different in age, geography, gender, creative status and popularity” (Christakoudy 2020: 243), through which a rethinking of stereotypes regarding dichotomies such as North-South, East-West is achieved.

The searching modernist souls of the poets, striving for their Ithaca or simply on an endless path, affirm the cosmopolitan character of the literature of a recently revived state, whose creative aspirations, however, have never died down. The subtitle of the last chapter of the book: “And the essence and meaning of human existence, shown in a tangible form, are precisely the art that creates”, summarizes in a very comprehensive way the modernist aspirations that arose in the dynamic reality of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Again, questions that are very distinct today. With her research, Fotiny Christakoudy offers not just studies on the modern Greek poetry, but a kaleidoscopic look at it and the accompanying processes in the spirit of comparative literature.