Αγγελικη Παπαγεωργιου, *Το Χρονικό του ιερέα της Διοκλείας*. Κείμενο, μετάφραση, σχόλια, τα πρόσωπα και ο χώρος, έκδ. Αρμός, Αθήνα 2012, pp. 453. ISBN 978-960-527-690-4

The old truth that books have their own destinies (*Habent sua fata libelli*), formulated in a simple idea by the ancient Roman poet Horace (Quintus Horatius Flaccus), showcased in various ways and proven numerous times, is in a way also true for a historical text that is very often referred to as the "oldest preserved narrative source for Serbian and Croatian history up until the mid-twelfth century". It is the text, preserved in Latin and Slavic language versions, which came to be known within South Slavic historiography as the *Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja (Letopis popa Dukljanina)* or the *Chronicle of Dioclea (Barski rodoslov)*. This source, in which legends intertwine with actual historical events, and often it is difficult to decipher which is fact and which legend, covers a long period of time ranging from the fifth to the twelfth century. Of course, its authenticity diminishes the further in the past its narrative goes, and as we read texts closer to the twelfth century, particularly from the beginning of the tenth century onwards, the reliability and veracity of its information increase. However, scholarship has reviewed the historical value of this text mostly negatively, but it was more appreciated as a geographical source. This is why particular caution was necessary in the interpretation and validation of the historical facts mentioned in this text.

Ever since the academic community found out about the so-called *Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja*, or *Chronicle of Dioclea*, it aroused many controversies and incited scholarly debates that have been going on for several centuries, and which involved many researchers from different countries. At the starting line of this great scholarly race stands the early sixteenth-century Benedictine monk Ludovicus Cerva Tubero (Ludovik Crijević Tuberon). There follow the learned man from Trogir, Ivan Lučić (Joannes Lucius), and the brilliant French erudite Charles

Dufresne Dom. Du Cange from the seventeenth century, to be followed by quite a large number of scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as Ivan Črnčić, Franjo Rački, Kosta Nikolajević, Ferdo Šišić, Nikola Radojčić, Stanoje Stanojević, Vladimir Mošin, Nikola Banašević, John V. A. Fine, Jan Lešny, Slavko Mijušković, Mladen Ančić, Milorad Medini, Eduard Peričić, S. Bujan and Tibor Živković. It was said a long time ago that the *Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja*, or the *Chronicle of Dioclea*, "represents one of the most complex historical works of the Middle Ages".

However, even though numerous studies have been written about this historical work during the course of several centuries, a superficial examination shows that the differences among the researchers are considerable and that a final judgment about the author, the time of its composition, its purpose, the relation between the so-called Croatian and Latin versions, does not actually exist yet. Thus, for example, one of the earliest dates of composition of this work falls around 1150, whereas there are scholars who date it much later– even to the fifteenth century. Several decades ago, a very-well informed and sharp Serbian researcher very cleverly (and a bit depressingly) observed that all the discussions about the *Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja* have one thing in common: "the efforts invested in its research do not correspond to the accomplishments achieved".

Lately, however, after a long period of inertia, certain new theories arose about this interesting (and to a great degree mysterious) text. They came from the pen of Tibor Živković (1966–2013), a colleague who left us recently and only too soon, whose primary focus of research was the history of the South Slavic peoples in the early Middle Ages. He was of the opinion that this work was composed at the very end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century; that it was commissioned by Pavle Šubić, the most powerful Croatian dignitary of the time, and written by Rüdiger, a clergyman of Czech descent and member of the Cistercian order. One of his conclusions was that this work is "an exceptionally good example how to write history for political purposes of an esteemed dignitary who has excessive political ambition". Moreover, Živković believed that instead of the existing titles –*Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja* or *Chronicle of Dioclea* – the correct and most accurate title of this work should be *Gesta regum Sclavorum*. Of course, some of Živković's conclusions still need to pass the test of time and any possible criticisms, that is, either confirmation or challenging by the researchers to come.

This very extensive introduction was necessary to clarify the great difficulties that Dr Angeliki Papageorgiou was facing in her work. She had to fully understand

and evaluate the handwritten traditions of both versions, Latin as well as Slavonic, to decipher a very complex and perplexing game of arguments and counterarguments by a vast array of researchers over a long time span covering several centuries, to clarify all aforementioned controversies linked to this historical work that is tremendously important for the history of certain areas in the western parts of the Balkan Peninsula (using the language of modern geography – Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and part of Albania, i.e. former Western Illyricum), and which relate to the author, place and time of its composition, the person who commissioned the text and the multilayered composition of the text itself. And, we should add immediately, she did a very good job of completing this expansive and very difficult research, expressing the necessary scientific caution and scrupulousness, as well as impressive scholarly meticulousness.

In the introductory part, Dr Papageorgiou concisely, but at the same time very comprehensively, highlights the academic discussions that span centuries and were provoked by this historical source. The introduction is followed by the Latin text of the source, and afterwards its translation into Modern Greek, which is accompanied by very thorough commentaries, so important for this controversial text.

Then follow three very important chapters. The first one represents the prosopographic lexicon and it relates to the persons mentioned in the work *Gesta regum Sclavorum*. It includes persons very well known in historiography, e.g. Byzantine emperors or individual South Slavic rulers, but also completely unknown individuals who are not mentioned anywhere else but in this particular source. These brief prosopographic notes have been annotated by Dr Papageorgiou with the appropriate literature.

The second chapter is dedicated to the consideration of geographic facts that can be found in the text *Gesta regum Sclavorum*. It has already been mentioned that these facts are more reliable than the historical ones, and therefore have great significance. Here they are listed in alphabetical order and annotated with the appropriate literature. In this way, this valuable source, full of dilemmas and the unknowns, has been brought closer to the modern reader. Writing this chapter, as well as the previous one, demanded the heuristic, as well as considerable research effort.

Finally, the third chapter, perhaps the one most interesting for the Greek readers, bears the title “Byzantium and the Byzantines”. Talking about Byzantine history, the author of the text *Gesta regum Sclavorum* commences with Emperor Anastasius I Dicorus (491–518) and concludes with the reign of Emperor Manuel

I Komnenos (1143–1180). Dr Papageorgiou rightfully stresses the fact that modern research bibliography is filled with the Byzantines' perceptions about other peoples and states, but, if we exclude a few examples of how the authors from the Latin world of Western Europe perceived the Byzantines, there are very few texts showing the perceptions of other peoples, in this particular case the South Slavs, about the Byzantines. One general perception of the Byzantine emperors, which often contains unfounded negative opinions, is shown through the prism of the contemporary relations between the Christian East and the Christian West, that is, the relations from the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries, where the schism in 1054 was only reinforced by the failure of the Union of Churches that was signed in Lyon in 1274. The tendency of the author to diminish the significance of the presence of Byzantium in the western parts of the Balkan Peninsula is apparent, sometimes through events the truth about which is bent, to say the least, and sometimes through information that do not reflect reality and historical truth. Even though it comprises a relatively small part of this book, the chapter "Byzantium and the Byzantines", scientifically speaking, is perhaps the most important and valuable contribution of Angeliki Papageorgiou's research efforts.

Considering the already mentioned void in scholarly literature that relates to the very few studies discussing the way certain South Slavic people perceived the Byzantines, perhaps the Greek audience may be interested in some other Serbian medieval sources that provide information about the Byzantine Empire (for example, hagiographies, inscriptions, genealogies, annals, etc.). Of course, their significance is not as great as that of the Byzantine sources for Serbian history. Nevertheless, these sources, because of the information they provide, deserve to attract the attention of Greek medievalists and Greek readers in general who are interested in the Middle Ages.

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