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J. KALIĆ, *European Borders in Serbian History* · D. PRERADOVIĆ, *The Reception and Interpretation of Jerome's Description of Two of St Hilarion's Epidaurian Miracles in Dubrovnik-based Sources and Tradition* · N. S. ŠULETIĆ, *Usurpations of and Designated Successions to the Throne in the Serbian Patriarchat. The Case of Patriarch Moses Rajović (1712–24)* · M. KOVIĆ, *Liberalism and Imperialism: Croce and d'Annunzio in Serbian Culture 1903–1914* · A. BASCIANI, *A Late Offensive. Italian Cultural Action in Belgrade in the Last Phase of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1937–1941)* · T. SANDU, *Le fascisme roumain dans un contexte centre-européen : historiographie et problématiques* · R. YEOMANS, *Weddings of the Dead: Ustasha Funerals and Life Cycle Rituals in Fascist Croatia* · M. CUZZI, *The Refractory Community: Yugoslav Anti-communists in Post-war Italy* · S. MIŠIĆ, *Serbian Orthodox Church Municipality in Trieste in Yugoslav-Italian Relations 1954–1971* · A. ĐURIĆ MILOVANOVIĆ, *"Hidden Religious Landscapes": Religious Minorities and Religious Renewal Movements in the Borderlands of the Serbian and Romanian Banat* ❧

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REVIEWS

ELKA BAKALOVA, MARGARET DIMITROVA AND M. A. JOHNSON, EDs. *MEDIEVAL BULGARIAN ART AND LETTERS IN A BYZANTINE CONTEXT*.
Sofia: American Research Center in Sofia, 2017, 573 p.

Reviewed by Jelena Bogdanović*

At the time when he served as director of the United States Office of the American Research Center in Sofia, Todor Petev (PhD Princeton University) originally envisioned a two-volume publication for the 22nd International Congress of Byzantine Studies held in Sofia in 2011 in order to present academic research done in Bulgaria to a wider, international scholarly audience. This volume *Medieval Bulgarian Art and Letters in a Byzantine Context* is the second of the two prepared for the occasion. The first volume, *State and Church: Studies in Medieval Bulgaria and Byzantium*, eds. Vassil Gjuzeev and Kiril Petkov (Sofia: American Research Center in Sofia, 2011) focused on historical studies and was published by the time of the Byzantine Congress. This belated but most welcome second volume focuses on cultural studies as a nexus of art history, literary studies, philosophy and theology, and contains twenty-four papers by prominent Bulgarian scholars either prepared particularly for this book or previously

published in Bulgarian periodicals. The contributions were compiled by doyens of Byzantine and medieval studies in the Balkans, Dr Elka Bakalova of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Professors Margaret Dimitrova and Georgi Kapriev, both of St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, and co-edited by Bakalova, Dimitrova and M. A. “Pasha” Johnson of the Hilandar Research Library at the Ohio State University, with the latter additionally preparing the translation of the Bulgarian articles into English.

The volume is divided into three sections – Art; Philosophy and Theology; and Philology. Each section begins with an historiographical overview of the discipline in the Bulgarian context, followed by selected papers relevant to each discipline. The texts are complemented by an annotated, chronologically presented bibliography that summarizes selected scholarly publications in

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art and philology of interest to both emerging and established scholars.

The first section of the book contains nine essays dealing with art themes by focusing on monumental church decoration and features of church architecture, such as church entrances, delicately carved church doors or liturgical furnishings, portable objects, and textiles. The essays are supplemented with seventy color and black-and-white illustrations and linear drawings. This art section starts with an important historiographical essay by Elka Bakalova (pp. 3–25), who lucidly surveys the development of art history as an academic discipline and the major scholarly trends in Bulgaria. She presents the actual although curiously elusive presence of medieval Bulgarian art and its context within Byzantine and Western medieval arts, because Byzantine and medieval Bulgarian arts were studied only within general art history and Western medieval art courses at universities in Bulgaria. The National Academy of Art, Institute for Art Studies, and the New Bulgarian University are other institutions that support the study of art. The Archaeological Museum, established in 1892, took up a particular role in the promotion of Bulgarian and Byzantine art. Prominent Russian émigré scholars Nikodim Kondakov and André Grabar, who lived and worked briefly in Bulgaria in the 1920s, laid the foundations of Bulgarian and Byzantine art studies before moving to Charles University in Prague and to Strasbourg and Paris, respectively. With Bulgarian medievalists Krüstiü Miiatev, Aleksandür Rashenov, and Nikola Mavrodinov, Grabar later prepared important publications on Bulgarian art and architecture and worked on their consideration for UNESCO sites, an essential step for their international presence and acknowledgment. Bakalova summarizes post-World War II burgeoning developments of these studies marked by state supported research and, occasionally, the heavy-handed preservation of art and architecture in Bulgaria

as being predominantly understood as the expression of national identity. She additionally highlights the most recent threshold after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe as when, “scholars no longer look for and emphasize the Bulgarian contributions to European civilization; rather, they consider various elements of Bulgarian art more broadly as part of the larger European culture” (p. 24). Bakalova’s critical overview of the current state of Bulgarian studies of art history additionally explains the major scholarly methods that predominantly focus on formal and functional analyses of art objects, typological studies, iconography, iconology, and more recently, methods deriving from social studies, cultural anthropology, and semiotics. Within such methodological frameworks, the following art historical essays in this section examine the mural decoration of church entrances (Georgi Gerov, pp. 26–40), the early Byzantine ambos recovered in the churches in the territory of modern Bulgaria (Iva Dosseva, pp. 50–68), Constantinopolitan bronze processional crosses found in Bulgaria (Konstantin Totev, pp. 69–103), monumental paintings of the chapel of Bojana Church (Bisserka Penkova, pp. 104–122), Hreljo’s Doors in Rila Monastery (Ivanka Gergova, pp. 123–144), zoomorphic imagery (Daniel Fokas, pp. 145–159), the theme of the Ancient of Days (Margarita Kuyumdzhieva, pp. 160–191), and the Byzantine liturgical textiles *aer-epitaphioi* found in Bulgaria (Yuliana Boycheva, pp. 192–222).

The section on philosophy and theology consists of four essays. This section opens with the text by Gergana Dineva (pp. 225–234), who offers an overview of Bulgarian scholarship of selected Byzantine theological texts that can be rightly studied within the context of medieval philosophy, even if Byzantine theology never developed as a systematic discipline as in the medieval West. As a relatively young discipline that situates texts within philosophical research, previously studied only within theological

and literary studies, the study of Byzantine philosophy in Bulgaria follows the general and latest international trends and actively participates in international discourse. Georgi Kapriev in his engaging contribution explores arithmology in the work of Maximus the Confessor (pp. 235–246). Ivan Christov points to the still understudied fragments of an anti-Palamite treatise from the library of Bačkovo monastery (pp. 247–266). Svet Ribolov examines the theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia from the perspective of moral philosophy and educational mission (pp. 267–293).

The third and most developed section presents the philological studies of Byzantine and Slavic texts in medieval Bulgaria, which here, in contrast to the first two sections of this volume, include consideration of both their religious and secular contexts. The section contains eleven essays, the first one again representing an historiographical overview of the state of scholarship in the field. Textual studies have dominated medieval scholarship since its inception, and its maturity and relative methodological cohesiveness is observable in this section. Margaret Dimitrova discusses the development of Bulgarian studies of Byzantine literature, its reception, and translation as early as medieval times (pp. 297–364). Her text essentially has three major parts: an overview of Greek texts preserved in Bulgaria expanded by the study of Greek texts on Mt. Athos by contemporary Bulgarian scholar Cyril Pavlikianov; the presentation of Byzantine-Bulgarian literary dialogue and a significant contribution of Bulgarian scholars to deciphering the extant medieval texts and inscriptions in Glagolitic and Cyrillic and their reference to comparative Greek texts; and a typological synopsis of various textual genres of the Slavic texts within their Byzantine context, ranging from the Bible, exegetical and theological literature, to juridical and historical texts. Dorotei Getov then presents six Slavo-Byzantine palimpsest fragments preserved in the National Libraries

in Plovdiv and Sofia which point to Slavic translations of early Byzantine books (pp. 365–375). Iskra Hristova-Shomova details the linguistic features and translation strategies of Sts. Cyril and Methodios who may have used when translating Byzantine Greek into Old Church Slavonic, effectively embracing the Slavic cultural milieu in the process (pp. 376–389). Mariya Yovcheva in her text points to the specifics of Slavonic original hymnographical texts that may have developed independently of Byzantine models (pp. 390–419). Ivan Dobrev (pp. 420–436) considers the role of acrostics in the analysis of authorship and authenticity of medieval texts and suggests a Byzantine intellectual, George Skylitzes, as the author of the canons and life of St. John of Rila. Anisava Miltenova focuses on the translations of Byzantine monastic florilegia (pp. 437–465), Kazimir Popkonstantinov on the translations of the letter of King Abgar to Jesus Christ within Byzantine-Slavic contexts (pp. 466–478), Vasia Velinova on the apotropaic function of amulets bearing the name of St. Sisinnios (pp. 479–489), Klimentina Ivanova on the redactions of Tŭrnovo collections (pp. 500–523), Ekaterina Pantcheva Dikova on rhetorical devices in hagiographical works by St. Evtimii, the Patriarch of Tŭrnovo (pp. 524–532), and Boriana Hristova on the exegetical books and their audience in medieval Bulgarian culture (pp. 533–541).

Medieval Bulgarian Art and Letters in a Byzantine Context is an important volume that highlights Bulgarian-Byzantine cultural interactions, examined through the lenses of art, philosophy, theology, and philology. Appropriately presented in the widely used English language, the book is highly relevant for both scholars and general audience interested not only in Byzantine and medieval Bulgarian art and culture but also for those interested in the complexities of Balkan studies, their historical development and research trends.

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