Citation: Borowska, M. (2021). The Slavic Homer: From Grigorios Stavridis to Grigor Prličev (J. Dutkiewicz, Trans.). *Colloquia Humanistica*, *2021*(10), Article 2665. https://doi.org/10.11649/ch.2665

Colloquia Humanistica 10 (2021)
Heritage and the Post-Socialist City: Cultural and Social Perspectives
Article No. 2665
https://doi.org/10.11649/ch.2665

COLLOQUIA HUMANISTICA

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The Slavic Homer: From Grigorios Stavridis to Grigor Prličev

Abstract

In 1860 Stavridis/Prličev's poem *Armatol* unexpectedly won him the University of Athens poetry competition, which met with opposition from part of the Greek community and a smear campaign in the press. Despite his declarations of having a "Hellenic heart", the author from Ohrid was not well received by Athenian society. He took part in the competition once more two years later, this time trying to match Homer himself and presenting an extensive though unfinished epic poem with Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg as the protagonist. The paper, which serves as an introduction to the Polish translation of *Skanderbeg*, contains extensive excerpts from the reports of both competition committees, chaired by Alexandros Rangavis, especially the second one, when the judges justified why they could not award Stavridis the prize despite being impressed with his poem. His disappointment at his cool reception and his failure in the competition most likely contributed to a radical change in the attitude of the Slavic Homer, who

Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences
Editor-in-chief: Jolanta Sujecka
Conception and academic editing: Maciej Falski, Linda Kovářová

not only stopped "serving Greece" but began vigorously eliminating any Greek influences in his native Ohrid.

Keywords: Stavridis/Prličev, Homer, Skanderbeg, epic, University of Athens poetry competition.

On 15 April 1860 the Athenian literary journal *Πανδώρα* (*Ο Ποιητικός Διαγωνισμός του 1860 έτους*, No. 242 [1860-04-15] and 243 [1860-05-01]; "O Poiētikos Diagōnismos", 1860a, 1860b) published a report from the ceremony celebrating the winner of the annual Rallis Competition in poetry,[1] one of the most important Athenian cultural events in the second half of the nineteenth century. The ceremony was held at the University of Athens on 25 March 1860, the anniversary of the outbreak of the 1821 uprising. In accordance with the competition rules specified by the sponsor of the prizes, Amvrosios Rallis, the authors had anonymously submitted poems on solemn and noble national themes (historical or social), no shorter than 500 lines, obligatorily written in the official learned language of the time, Katharevousa. They were judged by a committee chosen by the university's senate from among its members. The judges voted by dropping either a black or a white pebble (Moullas, 1989).

In a room filled to capacity, in the presence of members of the government and the intellectual elite of Athens, the committee's chairman Alexandros Rizos Rangavis[2] announced that the winner of the year's competition was the author of the poem Αρματωλός [Armatol], who had not yet revealed his name and was donating half of the prize money to charity (at least

[1] The University of Athens held the first poetry competition in 1851. From the name of the man who sponsored the prizes, a wealthy merchant from Trieste called Amvrosios Rallis (Αμβρόσιος Ράλλης, 1798–1886), its official name until 1861 was the Rallis Competition (Ραλλείος Διαγωνισμός, Ράλλειον). The winner that year was Georgios Zalokostas (Γεώργιος Ζαλοκώστας, 1805–1858), the author of brilliant lyrical poems in Demotic. The winning poem was Το Μεσολόγγιον [Messolonghi], written in the cumbersome Katharevousa, as the rules required.

[2] Alexandros Rizos Rangavis (Αλέξανδρος Ρίζος Ραγκαβής, 1809–1892), a learned polyhistor from the influential Phanariot family, military man, diplomat, poet (initially also in Demotic) and writer (author of the first Modern Greek historical novel in the style of Walter Scott, Ο Αυθέντης του Μορέως [Ruler of the Morea] in Katharevousa, professor of archaeology at the University of Athens, foreign minister in the years 1856–1859, and from 1867 Greek ambassador to the United States, Turkey, France and Germany. He sat on the Rallis Competition committee several times, starting from the first one, held in 1851. Author of the first Modern Greek history of literature, in which he rejected colloquial language (Demotic) as being, in his opinion, incapable of expressing lofty feelings, and folk songs as being the primitive product of uneducated commoners.

according to the minutes drawn up by the university's secretary, Ghikas Dokos, on 27 May). It was only then, as *Pandora* reported, that a young man came forward and announced he was the author of the poem *Armatol*, his name was Grigorios Stavridis, he was a student of the Medical Faculty and came from Macedonia, "τῆς χώρας ἐκείνης, ἥτις οὐδεποτε ἔπαυσε συνεισφέρουσα ἄφθονον καὶ γενναῖον ἔρανον διανοητικόν τε, ἐμπορικόν, στρατιωτικὸν καὶ γεωργικὸν εἰς τὴν ὅλην Ἑλλάδα".[3]

In the justification, which *Pandora* published in its entirety, the judges who signed it, i.e. M. Ikonomidis,[4] Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos[5] and Rangavis himself, presented a detailed analysis of all fourteen poems entered anonymously in the competition (a total of over 20,000 lines), often scathingly criticising their clumsy and excessively elaborate language, errors of meter and "bundles of worn clichés" as well as deficiencies of storylines, ignorance of history and questionable lyrical ruminations. Only three works deserved attention, according to the judges: Ἅγιος Μηνάς [Saint Minas],[6] the drama Κυψελίδαι [The Kypselidai][7] and the poem *Armatol*.

This is what they wrote about the last composition:

> Μᾶς ὑπολείπεται ἔτι ἓν εἰς ἐξέτασιν ποίημα, πολὺ τῶν ἄλλων βραχύτερον, εἰς ὁμοιοκαταλήκτους στίχους γεγραμμένον, καὶ « Ἁρματωλὸς » ἐπιγραφόμενον. Οἱ στίχοι αὐτοῦ εἰσὶν ἐναλλὰξ δεκαπεντασύλλαβοι παροξύτονοι, καὶ ὀκτασύλλαβοι ὀξύτονοι, καὶ τούτων ἡ ὁμοιοκαταληξία δὲν εἶναι ἐντελῶς ἀκριβής (ακρὶς = βαρεῖς, πιστοὶ = αυτοί, ομοῦ=η καρδιά μου). Καὶ ἡ διάθεσις δὲ αὕτη τῶν στίχων καταλληλοτέρα θὰ ἦν εἰς λυρικὸν μᾶλλον ἢ εἰς ἐπικὸν ποίημα, ὡς εἶναι τὸ τεμάχιον τοῦτο, διότι διατέμνουσι τὴν συνεχῆ ἀφήγησιν εἰς ἀτελεύτητον συνέχειαν μικρῶν

[3] "the land that has never ceased to serve all of Hellas with its generous intellectual, economic, military and agricultural contribution" ("O Poiētikós Diagōnismós", 1860a). All Modern Greek quotations have been translated into English from the Polish translations by Małgorzata Borowska (MB).

[4] Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos (Κωνσταντίνος Παπαρρηγόπουλος, 1815–1891), a learned polyhistor, father of Modern Greek historiography, author of the monumental Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Εθνους [History of the Greek Nation], member of the competition committee until 1864.

[5] I have not found any information about M. Ikonomidis. The report was undoubtedly signed by Vasilios Ikonomidis (Βασίλειος Οικονομίδης, 1814–1894), an eminent lawyer, rector of Athens university in 1859/1860.

[6] The poem's author turned out to be Theodor Orfanidis (Θεόδωρος Ορφανίδης, 1817–1886), a respected botanist who discovered over fifty species of Greek flora, also a poet and harsh literary critic, prize-winner in the Rallis Competition in 1855 for his exalted poem written in hexameter, Άννα και Φλώρος [Anna and Floros], and in 1858 for the poem Χίος δούλη [The Captive Woman from Chios]. His *Saint Minas* won a degree of popularity and was even translated into Italian.

[7] The author of this drama was Dimitrios Vernardakis (Δημήτριος Βερναρδάκης, 1833–1907), a learned polyhistor, professor of history at the University of Athens, author of Modern Greek Romantic drama who was fascinated with Shakespeare; he had already been the prize-winner of the Rallis Competition in 1851 for the poem Εικασία [The Apparition].

στροφῶν, ὀχληρὰν διὰ τὴν ἀκοήν. Προσέτι δὲ παρατηροῦνται εἰς τὸ ποίημα τοῦτο καὶ ἐκθλίψεις ἄλλου πρὸ ἄλλου φωνήεντος οὐχὶ εὔκολοι οὐδὲ συνήθεις τῇ ἀκοῇ (ὅσ΄ ὁ ἥρως […]), καὶ ἀνισότητές τινες περὶ τὴν χρῆσιν τῆς γλώσσης, κατωτέρω μὲν τοῦ γενικοῦ αὐτῆς μέσου ὅρου, οἱ ἀναύξητοι ἐνίοτε παρατατικοὶ καὶ ἀόριστοι, καὶ αἱ συγκοπαὶ ‘ςτὸν, ‘ςτὴν, ἀνωτέρω δὲ αὐτοῦ λέξεις τινὲς λίαν ἀρχαΐζουσαι, οἷον νέκυς, κτλ. Ὑπάρχουσι δὲ τέλος καὶ τινες στίχοι παράτονοι καὶ κατὰ τὸ μέτρον βεβιασμένοι (π.χ. κ΄ἕκαστος σᾶς προσμειδιᾷ). Ἡ δ᾽ ὑπόθεσις εἶναι· Ἐν Ἀλβανίᾳ ἐν ᾗ ἀλληλομαχοῦσι τὰ χριστιανικὰ χωρία τοῖς Τουρκικοῖς, νέος χριστιανὸς φονευθεὶς ἐν συμπλοκῇ κατὰ τῶν Ὀθωμανῶν, φέρεται ὑπ΄ αὐτῶν τῶν περισωθέντων ἐχθρῶν του εἰς τὸ χωρίον του, ὅπου εἷς αὐτῶν διηγεῖται τ᾽ ἀνδραγαθήματά του, ὅπου τὸν κλαίει ἡ μήτηρ του, τὸν κλαίει ἡ μνηστή του, τὸν γάμον καὶ τὸν κόσμον τοῦ λοιποῦ ἀπαρνουμένη, τὸν κλαίουσιν αἱ μυρολόγοι καὶ τὸ χωρίον ὁλόκληρον· ἡ δὲ μήτηρ του πέμπει νὰ συλλέξῃ καὶ ἐνταφιάσῃ καὶ τοὺς πεσόντας συναγωνιστὰς τοῦ υἱοῦ της. Τοῦτο εἶναι ὅλον τὸ ποίημα!

Συνέπεσε ποτέ τις ἔν τινι τῶν δευτερευόντων τῆς Εὐρώπης Μουσείων, μεταξὺ ἀτέχνων καὶ ἀψύχων κολοσσῶν τῆς Αἰγύπτου, μεταξὺ τερατομόρφων ξοάνων τῶν Ἰνδιῶν, μεταξὺ ἔργων τῆς Ῥωμαικῆς παρακμῆς ὀγκωδῶν, πεφυσημένων καὶ ἀῤῥύθμως συγκεχυμένων, ν΄ ἀπαντήσῃ σύντριμμά τι ἀττικουργὲς καὶ καλλίτεχνον; Μικρὸς εἶναι ὁ λίθος,ὀλίγαι αἱ ἐπ᾽ αὐτοῦ γλυφαὶ, ἀλλ᾽ εἰς τὰς γραμμὰς αὐτῶν πόση ἀκρίβεια, πόση συμμετρία, πόσον αἴσθημα τοῦ καλοῦ, καὶ πόσην ζωὴν ἐνεφύσησεν εἰς τὸ ἀφελὲς τοῦτο προιὸν ἡ θαυματουργὸς σμίλη, ὥστε πρὸς αὐτὸ πάλλει ἡ καρδία, ὅταν πάντα τ᾽ ἄλλα ψυχρὰν τὴν ἀφίνουσι. Βιβλία ὁλόκληρα ἀπαιτεῖ ἡ τῶν πολυπλόκων ἐκείνων ἔργων ἐξήγησις τοῦτο ἄλλο σχόλιον δὲν ἐπιδέχεται,ἢ ἓν μόνον ἐπιφώνημα θαυμασμοῦ. Πρὸς τὸ τοιοῦτο σεμνὸν τῆς ἀρχαίας τέχνης ἔργον δύναται νὰ παραβληθῇ τὸ τελευταῖο τοῦτο ποιητικὸν προιόν. Ἡ γλῶσσα αὐτοῦ οὐ μόνον καθαρωτάτη καὶ ἄπταιστος εἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ θυγάτηρ τῆς ὡραιοτέρας τῶν γλωσσῶν, κατά τε τὴν λέξιν καὶ τὴν φράσιν, καὶ πρὸ πάντων κατὰ τὸ πνεῦμα μητρῴζουσα. Ἡ δὲ πλοκὴ τοῦ ποιήματος δὲν εἶναι ποικίλη, ὡς εἴδαμεν ἀλλ᾽ ἡ ἀλήθεια σπανίως προσδεῖται τῆς ποικιλίας ὅπως συγκινήσῃ καὶ ὅπως ἀρέσῃ. Εἰκοσιτέσσαρας ῥαψῳδίας ἔχει ἡ Ἰλιάς, καὶ ὅμως τί ἀπλούστερον τῆς πλοκῆς της; Τίς εἶναι ἡ πλοκὴ τῶν πλείστων δραματικῶν προιόντων τῆς ἀρχαιότητος; Καὶ ἵνα εἰς τὴν γλυπτικὴν ἐπανέλθωμεν, ὁ Ζεὺς τοῦ Φειδίου καὶ ἡ Ἀφροδίτη τοῦ Πραξιτέλους δὲν ἐθαυμάζοντο ἐν συμπλέγμασιν ἀλλ› ἕκαστον τῶν ἀγαλμάτων τούτων ἐν τῇ ἀφελείᾳ καὶ ἐν τῇ ἑνότητί του εἶναι αὐτὸ καθ› ἑαυτὸ σύμπλεγμα, αὐτὸ καθ› ἑαυτὸ ποίημα, ἔχον τὰ μέρη, τὰ ἐπεισόδια καὶ τὰς περιπετείας του. Οὕτω καὶ ἐν τῷ ποιήματι τούτῳ, τῷ κατ› ἀρχὰς ἄνευ ὑποθέσεως φαινομένῳ, πόσον ἐντόνως χρωματίζεται ὁ χαρακτὴρ τῆς φιλοστόργου ἀλλὰ καὶ γενναίας Ἀλβανίδος μητρός, πόσον ὡραία, ἀληθὴς καὶ σώφρων ἡ περιγραφὴ τῆς νέας μνηστῆς, πόσον ἐκ τῆς καρδίας ἀποῤῥέοντα τὰ μυρολόγια, καὶὅλα τὰ καθέκαστα πόσον ἐμπείρως καὶ περιττῶς εἰργασμένα, πόσον καλλιτέχνως συναρμολογούμενα πρὸς τὸν τοῦὅλου καταρτισμόν!Εν αὐτῷ οὐδὲν τὸ παρέλκον, τὸ ὀμιχλῶδες ἢ τὸ ἀμφίβολον, ἀλλὰ πᾶς στίχος στίλβει ὡς καθαρὸς μαργαρίτης ἐνηρμοσμένος εἰς τὴν οἰκείαν θέσιν τοῦ πλουσίου κοσμήματος […][8]

[8] "We have one more work to judge, much shorter than the others, written in rhyming distichs and entitled *Armatol*. Its meter alternates between trochaic decapentasyllabic and iambic octosyl-

To provide evidence of their argument, the committee included excerpts from the poem in their laudatory verdict, underlining the descriptive value and the psychological truth of the portrait of a girl in mourning, and then concluded:

> Τοιοῦτον ποίημα, τόσον σπουδαῖα προτερήματα ἔχον, ἴσως ἔπρεπε ν› ἀνήκῃ οὐχὶ εἰς ἓν χωρίον τῆς Ἀλβανίας, ἀλλὰ νὰ στέφῃ τὴν Ἑλλάδα καὶ τὸν ἀγῶνα αὐτῆς. Καὶ ὅμως οὐδεὶς φθόνος! Ἀφ› οὗ οὕτω τὸ ἠθέλησεν ὁ ποιητής, ἃς ἐπιφοιτῶσι κἂν ἐνίοτε ἡμᾶς ὀμφαὶ τῶν Μουσῶν, ὑπομιμνήσκουσαι ἡμῖν ὅτι καὶ ἀλλαχοῦ καὶ μακρὰν ἡμῶν, ζῶσιν ὁμογενεῖς, ὧν Ἑλληνικαὶ εἰσὶν αἱ καρδίαι, Ἑλληνικὰ τὰ ἤθη, καὶ Ἑλληνικὸς ὁ ἡρωισμός. Μ. Οικονομίδης, Κ. Παπαρρηγόπουλος, Α. Ρ. Ραγκαβής.[9]

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labic verses which, however, do not always rhyme perfectly. The structure of these lines would be more appropriate for a lyrical poem rather than an epic one, which this piece undoubtedly is, as the continuity of the narrative is split into an endless series of little stanzas, unpleasant to listen to. Moreover, one can notice clusters of sounds in this poem that are neither easy nor ordinary for the ear […] as well as certain faults in mastery of the language, below its usual average standard, such as unaugmented imperfects and aorists, or syncopes: ΄ςτὸν, ΄ςτὴν, and on the other hand the use of words too lofty and archaised for it, to mention νέκυς ['carcass'], etc. Finally, lines with an erroneous accent and violated meter (e.g. κ΄ἕκαστος σᾶς προσμειδιᾷ) also occur. The content, meanwhile, is this: In Albania, where Christian and Turkish villages are fighting each other, the body of a young Christian killed in a clash with the Ottomans is taken to his native village by the surviving foes, where one of them recounts his heroic deeds, where his mother grieves for him and where his fiancée weeps for him and renounces marriage and the world for ever. Mourners and the whole village lament him; the mother orders that all of her son's comrades in arms be recovered and buried. And that's the whole poem!

Have you ever, at any of the inferior European museums, among the bulky and soulless Egyptian giants, among the awful shapes of Indian statues, among the enormous creations of collapsing Rome, overblown and clumsily put together, come upon a fragment of the artistic craftsmanship of an Attic workshop? It is a small stone, with few carving marks, but what precision in their lines, what symmetry, what sense of beauty, how much life breathed into that simple product by a miracle-working chisel, that the heart starts pounding at the sight of it, whereas all the other things leave it indifferent. It would take thick tomes to analyse those complicated works, while this one needs no other explanation than just one – a cry of rapture. And it is next to that modest work of ancient art that this last work of poetry can stand. Its language, of the purest kind and veritably flawless, is at the same time a child of the most beautiful of languages, and as for the vocabulary and expression, and the mood above all, it simply breathes 'maternal longing'.

The story in the poem, as we have seen, is not complicated; indeed, the truth seldom accompanies complications in a way that is moving and pleasing. The *Iliad* has twenty-four books, while is there anything simpler than its plot? And what is the plot of most ancient plays like? If we look at a sculpture, we do not admire Phidias' Zeus or Praxiteles' Aphrodite for their complexity, but each of these statues in its simplicity and unity is in itself a 'relationship'; in itself a poem, having its own parts, and episodes, and adventures. Also in this work, which seemingly has no plot, how clearly drawn is the character of the loving but also valiant Albanian mother, how beautiful, genuine and unexaggerated the image of the young fiancée, how heartfelt her laments, and overall how skilfully and completely every detail is refined, how masterfully it is connected with the whole! Nothing here is superfluous, ambiguous or doubtful, but every line shines like a pure pearl placed in its proper setting in a priceless piece of jewellery […]"

[9] "Instead of belonging to just one Albanian village, perhaps this poem, which has such great

This conclusion shows that the judges had no doubts as to the "Hellenicity" of either *Armatol*'s author or the independence fighters on the Macedonian frontiers whose praises he sang. Nevertheless, the winner's appearance and clothing, and most likely also his young age, took everyone by surprise. His "strange" accent raised suspicion and, if we are to believe his later autobiography (*Автобиографија* 1893), Stavridis/Prličev had to prove his authorship by reciting excerpts from the poem to the committee from memory. He himself stated in writing that he acknowledged "Hellas as his homeland he worked and laboured for, and stated that his only desire was to contribute to the great cause of the Greek palingenesis":

> Σεβαστή μοι ἐπιτροπή! Διογενικῶς ἐλθὼν ἐν Ἀθήναις, ὑποβάλλω τὸ πρῶτον μου ποιητικὸν ἔργον, τὸν « Ἀρματωλόν », ὑπὸ τὴν στάθμην τῆς κρίσεως ὑμῶν […] καὶ ἄν μεν οἱ στίχοι μου ὁμοιάζουν κρωγμοὺς κοράκων, ὡς φαίνεται τῶρα εἰς ἐμέ, ἐπικρίνοντες μὴ σκώπτετε, παρακαλῶ, ἀλλὰ δι› εὐφήμου τινός τρόπου ὑποδείξατέ μοι τοῦτο καὶ ἐστὲ βέβαιοι, ὅτι οὐδέποτε πλέον θὰ σᾶς ἐνοχλήσω, διότι τέλος πάντων, δὲν θέλω ἡ Ἑλλὰς νὰ τρέφῃ πλειοτέρους ποιητὰς παρὰ γεωργούς ! […] Ἂν ὅμως εἰς τοὺς στίχους μου εὕρετε χάριν τινά, θέλων› ἀνταμείξητε, διὰ σμικροῦ κἂν μειδιάματος πατρικοῦ, τὰς ἀγρυπνίας καὶ τοὺς κόπους, οὗς κατέβαλον, εἴτε εἰς τοὺς ἀγροὺς περιφερόμενος, εἴτε εἰς τὴν πενιχρὰν καλύβην μου κεκλεισμένος διότι κατέβαλα αὐτοὺς οὐχὶ χάριν ἐμοῦ, ἀλλὰ χάριν τῆς Ἑλλάδος, καὶ ἂν δὲν εὗρον τὸ καλόν, τουλάχιστον τὸ ἐζήτησα. Γ. Σ. Π.[10]

Winning with such rivals as Orfanidis and Vernardakis was an incredible triumph for the young student. However, it soon turned out to be a bitter victory. The author of *Saint Minas*, Theodor Orfanidis, winner of several previous competitions, was surprised by his defeat, which he evidently had not expected; piqued, he reacted by launching an aggressive campaign that mainly attacked Rangavis, but indirectly targeted Stavridis/Prličev as well. The Athenian press started to abound in open letters, polemics and

virtues, should crown the whole of Hellas and its battles. Indeed, there is nothing standing in the way! And since this has been the Poet's wish, may we, too, sometimes be visited by the prophetic voices of the Muses, reminding us that there are other places, far from us, where our fellow tribesmen live, Hellenic hearts beating in their chests, their customs Hellenic, and their culture Hellenic […] (signed M. [?] Ikonomidis, K. Paparrigopoulos, A. R. Rangavis)."

[10] From *Αστήρ της Ανατολής* [Star of the East], dated 2 April 1860, p. 924: "Esteemed committee! Διογενικῶς [? – MB], having arrived in Athens, I submit this, my first poetic work *Armatol* to your critical judgment […]. If my poems are similar to the croaking of ravens, as it now appears to me, when criticising them I beg you not to mock but to show me this in some gentle way, and be sure I will never again impose myself on you, as in the end I do not at all wish for Hellas to have to feed more poets than it has farmers! […] If, however, you discover any charm in my poems, I would like you to repay me with even the weakest fatherly smile for those sleepless nights and the labour I never spared, whether wandering across fields or shut away in my poor mud hut, for I undertook it not for myself but for Hellas, and if I have not found beauty, at least that was my aim. G. S. P."

mutual attacks. In an open letter published in the newspaper *Αυγή* [Dawn] in May 1860, Orfanidis accused Stavridis of being Bulgarian (Detrez, 2012, p. 264), to which the outraged author of *Armatol* responded bitingly in the newspaper *Φως* [Light], asserting that he "had feelings and a heart incomparably more Hellenic than Orfanidis". He wrote:

> Λέγεις ὅτι εἶμαι Βούλγαρος! Μέγα θαῦμα!!! Χειροκροτήσατε Κύριοι!!! Ναί· Κ. Καθηγητά […] ἀλλ᾽ ἐπὶ δεκαπέντε ἔτη διετέλεσα ἀείποτε ὑπηρετῶν τὴν Ἑλλάδα, ἐν ᾧ σὺ νέος περιήρχεσο τὰς ῥύμας τῶν Ἀθηνῶν, σκάνδαλον τῆς κοινωνίας, διέδωκα τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν γλῶσσαν εἰς μέρη ὅπου ἦτον πάντῃ ἄγνωστος […]. Ναί, εἶμαι Βούλγαρος, ἀλλ᾽ ἔχω πολὺ Ἑλληνικώτερα τὰ αἰσθήματα καὶ τὴν καρδίαν, παρὰ σὲ τὸν ὑβριστήν… Ναὶ, εἶμαι Βούλγαρος καὶ Σκύθης μάλιστα ἐὰν θέλῃς. Ἀλλ᾽ αὐτὸς ὁ Σκύθης, μόλις πρώτην φορὰν ἐμφανισθεὶς εἰς τὸν ποιητικὸν ἀγῶνα, κατέβαλεν ἄνευ κόπου, σὲ τὸν παλαιὸν ποιητήν […][11]

He published *Armatol* in print almost immediately, and in the dedication to his "fellow countryman" Evangelos Zappas[12] he made sure to mention the "Hellenic heart" (Ελληνική καρδιά) again.[13]

Meanwhile, before the end of the same 1860, Orfanidis also released his poem, Ἅγιος Μηνάς [Saint Minas] (Orphanidēs, 1860), adding an extensive supplement at the end (pp. 192–240), in which he mockingly commented on the justification presented by Rangavis (and particularly the critique of his own poem). Among other things, he declared:

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[11] Quoted after (Giochalas, 1975, p. 99, footnote 188). "You say I am Bulgarian? Some miracle that is! Applaud, Sirs! Yes, professor […] only I spent a good fifteen years in Greece's service, and when you roamed the streets of Athens as a youth, to the indignation of society, I was spreading the Greek language in places where it was completely unknown […]. Yes, I am Bulgarian, but I have feelings and a heart much more Hellenic than yours... Yes, I am Bulgarian, nay, even Scythian if that is what you wish to call me. But barely had this Scythian taken part in a poetical rivalry for the very first time, when he easily beat you, a poet from time immemorial […]".

[12] Evangelos Zappas (Ευάγγελος Ζάππας, 1800–1865), a wealthy businessman and philanthropist, visionary who wanted to revive the Olympic games, sponsor of the first Olympics (1859, 1870, 1875) that preceded the modern international games. Zappas came from a village near Tepelena in Albania and served Ali Pasha in his youth, while Stavridis was from Ohrid; Zapas as a Romios was thus a "fellow countryman" of Stavridis/Prličev.

[13] In footnote 3 to *Armatol* Stavridis wrote: "Πάντες οἱ κάτοικοι τῆς Ἀλβανίας κατὰ τὰ φρονήματα, τὴν φυσιογνωμίαν, τὴν ἐνδυμασίαν, τὰ ἤθη καὶ ἔθιμα ἐμφαίνουσι τρανῶς, ὅτι εἶναι οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ Ἕλληνες. […] Εὐχῆς ἔργον εἶναι, ἄνδρες εἰδήμονες τῆς Ἀλβανικῆς γλώσσας νὰ πραγματευθῶσι περὶ τοῦ φιλολογικοῦ ἔργου τῆς συγγενείας τῆς Ἀλβανικῆς πρὸς τὴν ἀρχαῖαν Ἑλληνικήν, διὰ ν᾽ ἀποδειχθεῖ καὶ διὰ τοῦ μέσου τούτου ἡ πρὸς τοὺς Ἕλληνας ἀδελφότης τῶν Ἀλβανῶν, ὧν τὴν ἀπώλειαν μοιρολογεῖ ἡ Ἑλλάς, ὡς ἡ ἀρχαία Νιόβη τῶν αὐτῆς τέκνων ἐρημωθεῖσα" (In their mentality, appearance, costume, manners and customs, all the inhabitants of Albania show clearly that they are nothing else but Greek. […] One should wish that experts on the Albanian tongue would prove the affinity between the Albanian language and ancient Greek through philological research, so that they might thus also show that the Albanians, whose loss Hellas is lamenting like ancient Niobe deprived of her children, are brothers of the Greeks).

> Μαρτυρῶ ἐπὶ σταυροῦ ὅτι οὐχὶ μόνον τὰ ἐπαινεθέντα δύω τελευταῖα ποίηματα, ἀλλὰ τὰ πλεῖστα τῶν ἐν τῷ διαγωνισμῷ ἦσαν καλήτερα τοῦ βραβευθέντος. (Orphanidēs, 1860, p. 161)[14]

Having dealt with Rangavis' criticism, Orfanidis continued by printing extensive excerpts of his correspondence with Rangavis, Stavridis and Levidis[15] from various newspapers and magazines. They mainly concerned Rangavis' accusations (and defence), this at a time when he was the Kingdom's foreign minister. Orfanidis perceived Stavridis as Rangavis' favourite and suspected him of serving Bulgarian propaganda (Orphanidēs, 1860, p. 212, footnote 2), seeking proof of this, among other things, in the fact that when he sent a copy of *Armatol* to the university authorities he signed it "G. Stavridis, Bulgarian Philhellene" (Orphanidēs, 1860, p. 212, footnote 1); he also imputed the politicisation and "rigging" of the competition. Jochalas does not rule out that Rangavis' support for the poet from Ohrid might in fact have had political undertones (Giochalas, 1975), although that would have meant that Rangavis was aware of the identity of *Armatol*'s author.

His cool reception in Athenian society did not deter Stavridis; on the contrary, it appears to have stimulated his ambition. In 1862 he again entered (anonymously, as required) the University of Athens competition (it was the first edition named after the new sponsor, Odessa-based merchant Ioannis Voutsinas).[16] This time he submitted the extensive historical poem *Skanderbeg*. He was now boldly following in Homer's footsteps.

Having analysed all the entries (one didactic and one lyrical poem, three dramas and six epic works), the committee comprising Paparrigopoulos as well as Konstantinos Asopios[17] and Stefanos Koumanoudis[18] took only three into consideration: the epic *Skanderbeg*, a lyrical "wistful soul" poem, and a piece entitled Αριστοφάνης και Σωκράτης [Aristophanes and

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[14] "I swear upon the Cross that not only the two commended works [*Saint Minas* and *The Kypselidai* – MB] but in fact most of those submitted for the competition are better than the crowned one!"

[15] Konstantinos Levidis (Κωνσταντίνος Λεβίδης, 1790–1868), a scholar and writer, "father of Greek journalism", editor of the opinion-forming newspaper *Ελπίς* [Hope] (published in the years 1836–1868), friend of Rangavis.

[16] From then on the contest was held as the Voutsinas Competition (Βουτσιναίος Διαγωνισμός).

[17] Konstantinos Asopios, actually Dsolbas (Κωνσταντίνος [Ντσόλμπας] Ασώπιος, 1785–1872), a scholar originally from Epirus, teacher at the Ionian Academy, three times rector of the University of Athens.

[18] Stefanos Koumanoudis (Στέφανος Κουμανούδης, 1818–1899), a classical scholar and archaeologist, professor of Latin studies at the University of Athens, many times dean of the Faculty of Philosophy.

Socrates], which ultimately won the competition in a unanimous vote, the author turning out to be Alexandros Skarlatos Vyzantios.[19] It needs to be recognised as Stavridis' great success that although unfinished, his poem had won its first recognition, as the committee acknowledged *Skanderbeg* to be "τὸ ἐπισημότερον αὐτῶν κατὰ σχῆμα καὶ ἔκτασιν" (the most significant among them in terms of form and length). This is how the judges appraised Stavridis' work:

> […] ἐποποιΐα ἔχουσα μῆκος ἑπταπλάσιον τοῦ διαγωνισμοῦ. Ἡ γλῶσσα αὐτοῦ εἶναι καθαρά, ἑλληνίζουσα,[20] καὶ μάλιστα λίαν, ἴσως ὑπὲρ τὸ δέον, καὶ ἐνίοτε ἄνευ ἀνάγκης ἑλληνίζουσα. Ἀνεξαρτήτως ὅμως τούτου, εἶναι γλῶσσα ἀκριβής, εὐφραδής, ἐπιμεμελημένη, πεπαιδευμένον ἐλέγχουσα κάλαμον, καὶ ἠσκημένην αἴσθησιν τοῦ καλοῦ. Ἡ στιχουργία, ἐκτός τινων δυσαρέστων ἐκθλίψεων καί τινων χασμῳδιῶν, εἶναι ἐν γένει ὀρθὴ καὶ σπάνιοι εἰσὶν οἱ παράτονοι στίχοι. Ἀλλ› ὁ ποιητὴς κακῶς, ὡς φρονοῦμεν, ἔπραξε, παραδεχθεὶς τὸν τετράμετρον ἰαμβικόν, τὸν συνήθη δεκαπεντασύλλαβον στίχον ἄνευ ὁμοιοκαταληξίας. Ἂν ἐξ ἀδυναμίας ἀπέφυγεν αὐτῆς τὴν δυσχέρειαν, τότε προφανῶς ἐλαττοῦται ἐκείνων οἵτινες ὑπέβαλον ἑαυτοὺς εἰς αὐτὴν καὶ τὴν ὑπερενίκησαν εὐτυχῶς. Ἂν ὅμως, γιγώσκων νὰ ποιῆται χρῆσιν τῆς ὁμοιοκαταληξίας, ἀπέσεισεν αὐτὴν ἐκ προθέσεως, δὲν τὸν δικαιοῦμεν εἰς τὴν περίστασιν ταύτην. Οἱ δεκαπεντεσύλλαβοι στίχοι, ἕνεκα τῆς ὑποχρεωτικῆς των τομῆς μετὰ τὴν δευτέραν διποδίαν, ἔχουσιν εἰς μακρὰς συνθέσεις πολλὴν τὴν μονοτονίαν, ὅταν δὲν θεραπεύῃ αὐτὴν ἡ ὁμοιοκαταληξία, ζευγνοῦσα αὐτοὺς ἀνὰ δύω ἢ πλείονας. Τοῦτο λέγοντες, δὲν λησμονοῦμεν, ὅτι εἰς τὸν στίχον τοῦτον ἀνομοιοκαταληκτοῦντα χαίρει ἡ δημοτικὴ ἡμῶν ποίησις, ἀλλὰ τὰ ᾄσματα αὐτῆς εἰσὶ βραχέα καὶ προσέτι οἱ στίχοι αὐτῆς εἰσίν, οὕτως εἰπεῖν, σχεδὸν μεμονωμένοι, περιλαμβάνοντες ἕκαστος καθ› ἑαυτὸν ὁλοσχερῆ ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ ἔννοιαν. Ἡ ὁμοιοκαταληξία εἶναι, διὰ τὸ ἔμπειρον αὐτῆς, οὐχὶ ζυγὸς πιέζων ἢ πέδη τὸ βῆμα κωλύουσα, ἀλλὰ χρυσοῦς χαλινός, ὁδηγῶν τὴν ἀκάθεκτον φαντασίαν, ἢ ἀνθηρὰ ὄχθη συνέχουσα τὸν χείμαῤῥον τοῦ λόγου, μὴ ὑπερχειλὴς ὑπερβῇ πᾶν μέτρον φιλοκαλίας. Καὶ τῷ ὄντι οὕτω πῶς φαίνεται ἐκδικηθεῖσα καὶ κατὰ τοῦ ἡμετέρου ποιητοῦ ἡ παραμεληθεῖσα ὁμοιοκαταληξία. Μὴ ἀναχαιτιζόμενον ὑπ› αὐτῆς, ῥεῖ λάβρον καὶ συνεχὲς τὸ κῦμα τῆς στιχουργίας του, κατακλύζοντὰ πάντα πέριξ αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔκτασιν ἀτερμάτιστον καὶ μονότονον. Ἡ στιχουργία τόσῳ ἰσχνοτέρα ἀποβαίνει, ὅσῳ μᾶλλον ὀγκοῦται δι› ἐπιθέτων παρελκόντων καὶ λέξεων περιττῶν. Ὅ,τι ἐν πέντε στίχοις ἤθελεν ἐντόνως καὶ καλῶς ἐκφρασθῇ, λέγεται ἐνίοτε φορτικώτερον ἐν πεντηκόντα. Ἡ ἀξία τοῦ ποιήματος τούτου ἤθελε πενταπλασιασθῇ, ἂν ἡ ἔκτασις αὐτοῦ ἦτον ὑποπενταπλάσιος.
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> Εἶναι δ›, ὡς εἴπομεν, ὁ « Σκενδέρμπεης » ἐποποιΐα κατὰ τὸν τύπον, ἀλλὰ μόνον κατὰ τὸν τύπον. Ὑπάρχουσιν ἀντικείμενα καθ› ἑαυτὰ ὑψηλότερα καὶ αὐτῆς τῆς ποιήσεως, καὶ τοιοῦτο εἶναι τὸ θέαμα ἔθνους ἀγωνιζομένου ὑπὲρ τῆς ἐλευθερίας

[19] Alexandros Skarlatos Vyzantios (Αλέξανδρος Σκαρλάτος Βυζάντιος, 1841–1899), a journalist and political scientist, editor of *Νέα Ημέρα* [New Day] and its main contributor.

[20] ἑλληνίζουσα – "Hellenising" (language), i.e. excessively archaised, scholarly.

του. Ἀλλὰ καίτοι ὀρθὴ καὶ γόνιμος ἡ πρόθεσις τοῦ ποιητοῦ νὰ ἐκλέξῃ ὡς ἥρωα τῶν ἐπῶν του ἕνα τῶν τελευταίων καὶ ἐνδοξοτέρων προμάχων τῆς ἐθνικῆς ἀνεξαρτησίας, ἀλλὰ μόνη ἡ κατάλληλος ἐκλογὴ τῆς ὑποθέσεως δὲν ἀρκεῖ ὅπως μεταβάλῃ τὴν ἱστορίαν εἰς ποίησιν. Ἐξ ἱστορικῆς ῥίζης δύναται βεβαίως νὰ βλαστήσῃ γενναιότατον καὶ χαριέστατον ποιητικὸν ἄνθος. Ἀλλ› ὁ ποιητὴς τοῦ Σκενδέρβεη αὐτὴν μόνην σχεδὸν τὴν ξηρὰν ῥίζαν μᾶς παριστᾷ ἐν στιχουργικῷ περιβλήματι ἐνειλιμένη. Ἕν ἐκ τῶν πολεμικῶν ἔργων τοῦ ἥρωος τῆς Ἠπείρου, καὶ τοῦτο ἐκ τῶν δευτερευόντων, μάχη μεταξὺ αὐτοῦ καί τινος τῶν τοποτηρητῶν τοῦ Σουλτάνου, ἄνευ ἄλλης εὑρέσεως καὶ πλοκῆς, δὲν δύναται νὰ ἔχῃ τὸ μέγα ἐνδιαφέρον ὃ ἡ ποίησις ἀπαιτεῖ. Τῆς σκηνῆς μάλιστα οὕτω περιστελλομένης, ὁ Σκενδέρμπεης ἀντὶ διὰ τῆς ποιήσεως νὰ ἐξαρθῇ μᾶλλον γιγαντιαῖος, καταβιβάζεται ἐξ ἐναντίας καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ὕψους ἐφ› οὗ βλέπομεν αὐτὸν ἱστάμενον ἐν τῇ ἱστορίᾳ. Εἶναι πολεμιστὴς ἀνδρεῖος εἶναι Σκενδέρμπεης ὁ θοῦρος, κατὰ τὸν ποιητήν, ὅστις κατὰ ζῆλον τοῦ Ὁμήρου, πρὸς ὃν φαίνεται λίαν ἐξῳκειωμένος, οὐδέποτε σχεδὸν ἀναφέρει τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ ἥρωος ἄνευ τούτου τοῦ ἐπιθέτου, ἀλλὰ πολεμισταὶ ἀνδρεῖοι εἰσὶ καὶ ἄλλοι ἔκ τε τῶν χριστιανῶν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὀθωμανῶν, καὶ πολλοὶ ὡς εἰκὸς εἰσὶν ἑκατέρωθεν οἵ τε φονεύοντες καὶ οἱ φονευόμενοι, καὶ οὐδεὶς ὁ ἀποχρῶν λόγος ὅπως οὗτοι μᾶλλον ἐκείνων ὑπερισχύσωσιν, οὐδεμία πρᾶξις ἰδίως ἐνδιαφέρουσα, προέχουσα τῶν λοιπῶν, καὶ ἀπαιτοῦσα ἰδίαν ἀφήγησιν, οὐδεμία διακεκριμένη φυσιογνωμία, ἢ χαρακτὴρ εὐκρινῶς διαγεγραμμένος οὐδὲ κἂν τοῦ δικαίου ἢ τοῦ ἀδίκου ἡ πλάστιγξ πρὸς ποῦ ῥέπει δύναται εὐκόλως νὰ διαγνωσθῇ. Ὡς ὁ σατράπης λεηλατεῖ, αἰχμαλωτίζει καὶ βεβηλοῖ ναούς, οὕτω λέγει καὶ ὁ Σουλτάνος [lines 1927–1930].

Ἀξιῶν δ› ὁ ποιητὴς νὰ παρακολουθήσῃ τὸν μέγαν του ὁδηγὸν καὶ εἰς αὐτὴν τὴν ὑψίστην του πτῆσιν, παρεισάγει τὸν Θεὸν παρεμβαίνοντα μεταξὺ τοῦ Σατράπου καὶ μεταξὺ τοῦ Σκενδέρμπεη. Ἀλλ› ἀπ› ἐναντίας τοῦ Ὁμήρου, ὅστις τοῖς κατ› ἄνθρωπον πεπλασμένοις ἀρχαίοις Θεοῖς περίβαλλει, διά τινων γραμμῶν τῆς μεγαλοφυοῦς του γραφίδος, θείαν μεγαλειότητα, οὗτος σμικρύνει τὸν Θεὸν τοῦ παντός, καὶ ἀποδίδωσιν αὐτῷ πάθη οὐδ› ἀνθρώπου κἂν ἄξια, παριστῶν παραδείγματος χάριν αὐτὸν νεμεσῶντα κατὰ τοῦ Ὀθωμανοῦ σατράπου, οὐχὶ διότι ἐξολοθρεύει οὗτος λαοὺς χριστιανικούς, οὐχὶ διότι πλανᾷ τὴν ἐρήμωσιν καὶ τὴν καταστροφήν, ἀλλὰ διότι ὁ Βαλαβὰν προσέκρουσεν εἰς τὴν θείαν ἀξιοπρέπειαν καὶ εἰς τὴν οὐρανίαν ἐθιμοταξίαν [lines 3447–3458].

Ἀλλ› ἂν ὀργίζηται κατὰ τῶν Ὀθωμανῶν, οὐδόλως φιλοπροσωπεῖ καὶ πρὸς τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς ὁ Θεός. Κατ› αὐτῶν μάλιστα φαίνεται ἔχων οὐσιωδεστέρους πως λόγους δυσαρεσκείας. Ἰδοὺ πως περὶ τούτων λέγει ὁ ποιητὴς δι› ἀμυδρᾶς τινος, καθ› ἃ φαίνεται, ἀπηχήσεως τῶν τοῦ Τάσσου ἐπῶν [lines 125–154]. […]

Ἐπεισοδίων δὲν στερεῖται μὲν τὸ ποίημα πρόκειται μάλιστα, ὅταν συμπληρωθῇ νὰ περιλάβῃ καὶ πλείονα, ἃ ἀναγγέλλονται μόνον ἀλλ› εἰσὶ πάντα ὀλίγον τὴν πρᾶξιν διαποικίλοντα, προάγοντα, συμπλέκοντα, ἢ καθιστῶνται μᾶλλον ἐνδιαφέρουσαν. Ἓν ἐξ αὐτῶν, ὁ ἀνασκολοπισμὸς τοῦ Δίγκου ὑπερβαίνει τὰ τῇ τέχνῃ ἐπιτετραμμένα ὅρια τοῦ φοβεροῦ, καὶ χωρεῖ μέχρι τοῦ ἀπαισίου. Πολλὰ ὅμως ἔχει τὸ ποίημα τεμάχια ἐκλεκτὰ διά τε τοῦ ὕφους, τὴν γλαφυρότητα καὶ διὰ τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν

τῆς ἐξεργασίας, μάλιστα δ› ἐν ταῖς περιγραφαῖς καὶ ταῖς μικρογραφίαις. Ὡς παραδείγματα κείσθωσαν ἐκ πολλῶν τὰ ἑπόμενα [lines 1013–1020; 1427–1465; 3294-3356].[21]

[21] "[…] an epic poem many times longer than the competition requires. Its language is pure, all too 'Hellenising', maybe even more 'Hellenising' than necessary, and sometimes even when unnecessary. Nevertheless, this is precise, correct, polished language, in control of an experienced pen and a trained sense of beauty. Apart from a few unpleasant defects and deficiencies of meter, the poem, generally speaking, is correct, with seldom a wrongly accented line. However, the poet has made an unfortunate move – in our view – by choosing the iambic tetrameter, or unrhymed decapentasyllabic verse. If he was avoiding rhyming, not feeling up to handling it, then he is giving ground to those who took on the challenge and dealt with it successfully. If, however, being able to use rhyme he intentionally relinquished it, we do not justify him in such a case. Due to their specific structure, political poems become monotonous after the second dipody in longer works, unless this is prevented by rhymes combining them into distichs or larger wholes. Having said that, we by no means forget what pleasure our unrhymed folk poetry gives with this kind of verse. But its songs are short, and additionally its lines, so to speak, are 'solitary', as each one carries complete meaning in itself. For their skilful writer, rhymes are not an oppressive yoke or a chain binding the legs, but a golden bridle directing the uninhibited imagination, or a flowery riverbank blocking the stream of words so that it might not overflow from the lips, exceeding all measure in the love of beauty. Indeed, this is rather how rhymes, condemned and disdainfully rejected by our poet, appear to us. Without them to halt it, the rapid stream of his poem flows incessantly, drowning everything around it in an endless and monotonous space.
Poems come out the worse the more they are burdened with excessive and superfluous epithets. Something that might have been expressed powerfully and wonderfully in five lines sometimes drags on stubbornly for fifty! The value of this piece would increase fivefold if its length were made at least five times shorter.
Skanderbeg is, as we have already stated, an epic poem as regards its genre, but only its genre. There are themes in themselves of even greater importance than this genre of poetry, the image of a nation fighting for freedom being among them. But however appropriate and fertile the author's concept to choose one of the last and most famous precursors of the fight for national independence as the hero of his epic poem, a good choice alone is not enough for history to become poetry. From a historical root – obviously – there may grow the noblest and most graceful poetic flower. But the writer of *Skanderbeg* only presents the dry root to us, wrapped in robes of verse.
Just one of the Epirus hero's military deeds, and even that of secondary importance, namely a battle between him and one of the Sultan's governors, with no other ideas or twists and turns of the plot, cannot inspire the great interest that poetry demands. But since the scene has been thus restricted, instead of acquiring the dimension of a giant thanks to poetry, Skanderbeg even falls from the height to which we know history has elevated him. He is a brave fighter, 'Skanderbeg the valiant' according to the poet, who, with enthusiasm worthy of Homer, with whom he seems to be overfriendly, almost never mentions the hero's name without this epithet. But there are also other brave fighters, among the Christians as well as the Ottomans, and many – naturally – from both sides, killing or being killed, yet nothing in the narrative indicates that one side rather than the other has the advantage, no special deed stands out from the others or requires a separate narrative, no person is outstanding and no character is better described; even whether the balance tilts towards what is right or what is unjust would be hard to resolve. [Here the committee quotes excerpts from the poem, lines 1927–1930 – MB].
Trying to follow in the great Guide's footsteps also in his highest flight, he introduces God, who comes between the despot and Skanderbeg. But unlike Homer, who gave the ancient gods for-

While appreciating the poem's descriptive value, the committee also pointed out the author's inclination for exaggeration and his characteristic excessive minuteness of detail, citing the long description of Skanderbeg's garden (lines 1476–1510), which – according to the judges – "εἶναι περίεργος μᾶλλον ἢ ἐπαινετή, διὰ τὸ λεπτολόγον αὐτῆς καὶ διὰ τὴν μέχρι καταχρήσεως χρῆσιν τῶν ἐπιθέτων" (provoked surprise rather than admiration due to its excessive attention to detail and an overuse of epithets bordering on affectation). However, so as not to conclude their assessment with a critical comment, at the end the committee cited "ἓν ἄρτιον ἐπεισόδιον" (one well-rounded episode), maintained in the style of a Homeric digression: the story of Elmaz (lines 3294–3356).

Indeed, Stavridis' aim was truly Homeric in nature. The author drew liberally on the vocabulary, metaphors and poetics of the Homeric epic, in which he was exceptionally well versed. The poem comprised 3,792 lines (the published version is probably missing about two pages) and was never finished. The version entered in the competition only mentioned some themes of future episodes from time to time, a fact that was noticed and pointed out by the judges. Following faithfully in Homer's footsteps, the author of *Skanderbeg* opened his epic *in medias res* and concentrated it around a single event, the siege of Kruja, culminating in the fight between Skanderbeg and the despot Ballaban. As a result, there is barely any action. The poet almost desperately tried to add variety to the plot, sometimes introducing excessively long – as the competition committee noted – descriptive passages (Skanderbeg's residence and garden), digressions such as Karahasan's retrospective stories, Sinan's dramatic account of his

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med in the image of men truly divine dignity with a few lines of his noble style, he diminishes the God of Everything and gives Him feelings unworthy even of a human, for example showing Him taking revenge on the Ottoman despot not because he is annihilating Christian peoples, not because he plans havoc and extermination, but because Ballaban had hurt His Divine pride and the Divine order. [Here the committee quotes lines 3447–3458 – MB]. Yet God who is angry with the Ottomans is by no means friendly towards the Christians. Actually, He seems to have much more serious reasons to be displeased with them. Here is what the author says about this with the help of hazy, it appears, references to the works of Tasso. [Here the committee quotes lines 125–154 – MB]. […]

There is no shortage of episodes in this piece; on the contrary, if it is completed, it will contain a great many more, namely those that are only announced here. However, without exception these are minor episodes, not really enriching, anticipating and complicating the plot or arousing interest. One of them – the impalement of Dinko – oversteps the boundaries of horror acceptable in art and goes so far as to be disgusting.

However, this work also has many exquisite fragments thanks to excellent style and care taken to refine details, especially in descriptions and minor images. May the following serve as examples, chosen from among many more. [Here the committee quotes the description of the Furka pass: lines 1013–1020; Skanderbeg's stable: 1427–1565; the death of Elmaz: 3294–3356 – MB]."

Original text from the digital edition: Rizos Rankavēs, 1862.

failed expedition, or the encounter of the two horses, Sahin and Gelin, and the anticipation of the future fate of Skanderbeg's steed. One-on-one fights and *aristeiai* of the characters – Albanian (like the exploits of Dukagjin or Chernovik) as well as Ottoman (Ballaban, Sinan), ekphrases describing Skanderbeg's helmet or the cross he wore on his chest in great detail, reports from councils of war, speeches (or only mentions thereof) by the protagonists and, finally, extensive similes built with great attention to detail – Stavridis used all these elements and artistic means typical of epic poems not so much to imitate as to actually compete with Homer.

Not only does the siege of Kruja invoke the siege of Troy, while Skanderbeg appears as a magnanimous but easily angered Achilles and at the same time a heroic Hector defending the city, but even his wife Dorika with her infant son at her breast is reminiscent of Andromache, the faithful Dinko resembles Patroclus condemned by fate to die, while the wise old Karahasan trying to assuage Ballaban's anger is like Achilles' old tutor, Phoenix, warning his pupil against the consequences of blind anger, and also like the sensible elder, Nestor. The Olympian gods have been replaced in the poem with God Almighty, but He has turned out even more inclined to act out of resentment than Homer's Zeus, as the committee noted with some maliciousness. Imitation of Homer is also very noticeable in the poet's predilection for detailed descriptions of ways of killing people in the battlefield and an excess of details, not excluding the anatomical. There is also no shortage of references to Greek mythology. Even the Ottomans invoke Ate, Nemesis and Ares, for instance.

Jochalas (Giochalas, 1975, p. 100) thinks that the Ohrid poet's failure in this competition, and especially the harsh criticism from Rangavis, contributed greatly to a radical change in his attitude. He makes no mention, however, of the fact that this was also when news came of the death of the brothers Dimitar and Konstantin Miladinov, who had been arrested by the Turkish authorities after being denounced by a Greek Orthodox bishop. The poet had been taught by Dimitar, and the man's death, for which he blamed the Greeks, shocked him deeply, as he admitted himself in his autobiography. That was when Grigorios Stavridis ceased to exist and Grigor Prličev was born, who devoted himself to eliminating Greek influences in his native Ohrid and set himself a new goal: to translate Homer's epic into the Bulgarian language, or, rather, the local Ohrid language (he had to study intensely to learn Bulgarian).

Born in 1830, Stavridis/Prličev was the same age as the Greek state. After 400 years of Ottoman rule, the enslaved *rayahs*, or despised Turkish subjects, had won their freedom. A tiny state had been formed, whose borders encompassed only a minority of the Greek-speaking population

of the Ottoman Empire built on the ruins of Byzantium. Many participants in the uprising, including the inhabitants of Epirus, Crete, Thessaly and Macedonia, had been defeated and had not gained freedom at the time.

Everything had to be built from scratch in the newly formed Hellas, and one of the most serious problems of the young state was the mentality of its inhabitants, most of them illiterate, few of whom thought in terms of statehood. An eyewitness of the French Revolution and its dangerous consequences, the greatest Greek scholar of the time, Adamantios Korais, wrote to Thomas Jefferson early on in the uprising (1823), "when his homeland was being reborn":

> Il n'a pas été au pouvoir de nos tyrans d'empêcher cette renaissance; mais c'est precisement parce que notre liberté n'est encore qu'un enfant que son éducation exige bien des soins et des secours pour qu'elle ne périsse dans son berceau. On ne peut espérer ces secours que des hommes véritablement libres. C'est un malheur pour nous que de nous insurger dans un moment où notre instruction publique ne faisait que commencer. Nous sortons d'une très mauvaise école, d'une école turque, c'est tout dire […]. (*To Thomas Jefferson from Adamantios Coray*, n.d.)[22]

The process of turning Ottoman *rayahs* into responsible citizens of a European state would last several generations. In 1844 the then prime minister, Ioannis Kolettis,[23] gave a moving speech in the Greek parliament about the main duty of the Greek state being to liberate the enslaved brothers from the Turkish yoke, which was equivalent to the task of retaking the territories of the former Eastern Roman Empire and regaining the other – besides Athens – centre of Hellenism: "our City", i.e. Constantinople. The Great Idea was thus born, and would dominate Greek politics for almost a century, contributing to the consolidation of a national identity no longer only based on sharing a common religion and language, but increasingly on a "community of blood" and being proud of the Hellenic past (Mackridge, 2009). Since the times of Emperor Caracalla, all free people living in the eastern part of Imperium Romanum had been its citizens and had had the right to call themselves Romans. In Byzantine

[22] "It was not in the tyrants' power to prevent this rebirth; but it is precisely because our freedom is still only a child that its education requires much effort and assistance, so that it does not die in the cradle. We can only hope for such help from truly free men. It is our misfortune that we rebel at a time when our public education is only just beginning. We come out of a very bad school, the Turkish school: that says it all […]" (based on the Polish translation by MB).

[23] Ioannis Kolettis (Ιωάννης Κωλέττης, 1773–1847), an Epirote of Wallachian origin, personal physician to the son of Ali Pasha at the Ioannina court, Filiki Eteria member and uprising participant, leader of a pro-French party, during the civil war between the rebel factions he fought against the Moreot party but later went on to lead it. Prime minister of Greece from 1844 until his death.

writings the word "Hellene", associated with pre-Christian times, meant "pagan". In free Hellas, meanwhile, "Romioi" became a pejorative term, while "Hellene", evoking the glorious ancient past, made a triumphant comeback. The Byzantine heritage, i.e. that of the Romioi, became an unwanted and rather embarrassing burden. The new Hellenes, not without some influence of European Philhellenism, wanted to see themselves as the direct descendants of the ancient Greeks and considered themselves the rightful heirs to their legacy.

It was not without reason that with the influx of civil servants educated at Western or Russian universities, sons of wealthy families of the Greek diaspora, some of which went back to Roman times (especially those from the Greek district of Istanbul – Phanar), the language that became the official language of the state was not that of the Romioi – the colloquial, spoken, but also multiple-dialect Modern Greek (Demotic), but the artificial, scholarly "Hellenic" language of official documents, an archaised Greek that is known by the name of Katharevousa. And while the great poets at the turn of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, representatives of the "Ionian School", led by national bard Dionysios Solomos, had written in Demotic, creating a modern living literary language, in Greece diglossia reigned and no one could imagine a "serious" work of literature in any other language than Katharevousa, although everyone used colloquial speech – Demotic – in their daily lives.

Stavridis/Prličev was – obviously – a Romios, but was he also a Hellene? He suffered a similar humiliation to that which Greek novelist Georgios Vizyinos (Γεώργιος Βιζυηνός, 1847–1896), who was from Ottoman Thrace, suffered from Athenian society in 1874, when he was receiving his prize as the winner of the university competition, for his epic poem Ο Κόδρος about the mythical king of Athens, Codrus. Poet Georgios Drosinis, himself the winner of one of the competitions and a frequent member of the panel of judges, recounted colourfully and not without malice in his memoirs how "extremely strange a fellow" had appeared among Athenian society at the time (Borowska, 2017, p. 191). One might say the same thing about Stavridis/Prličev that Margaret Alexiou (2002, p. 310) wrote about Vizyinos: "[He] stands at the crossroads between old and new, between the multi-ethnic, polyglot Ottoman world and the assertive nationalism of the Greek state".

Translated from Polish by
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Słowiański Homer: Od Grigoriosa Stawridisa do Grigora Prličeva

W 1860 r. Stawridis-Prličev niespodziewanie wygrał konkurs poetycki Uniwersytetu Ateńskiego poematem *Armatol*, co spotkało się ze sprzeciwem części środowiska greckiego i nagonką w prasie. Mimo swoich deklaracji o „helleńskości serca" autor z Ochrydy nie został dobrze przyjęty na stołecznych salonach. Dwa lata później wziął ponownie udział w konkursie, na którym przedstawił, tym razem mierząc się z samym Homerem, obszerny, lecz nieskończony epicki utwór, którego bohaterem uczynił Jerzego Kastriotę Skanderbega. Artykuł, pełniący rolę wstępu do polskiego

przekładu *Skanderbega*, zawiera obszerne fragmenty ze sprawozdań obu komisji konkursowych pod przewodnictwem Aleksandrosa Rangawisa, zwłaszcza drugiego, w którym jurorzy uzasadniali, dlaczego mimo wrażenia, jakie na nich zrobił utwór Stawridisa, nie mogli przyznać mu nagrody. Rozczarowanie chłodnym przyjęciem i niepowodzenie w konkursie przyczyniło się zapewne do radykalnej zmiany postawy słowiańskiego Homera, który nie tylko przestał „służyć Grecji", lecz energicznie począł zwalczać wszelkie wpływy greckie w rodzinnej Ochrydzie.

Słowa kluczowe: Stawridis, Prličev, Homer, Skanderbeg, epika, konkurs poetycki Uniwersytetu Ateńskiego.

Note

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No competing interests have been declared.
The preparation of the article was self-funded by the author.

Publication History

Received: 2021-10-09, Accepted: 2021-10-18, Published: 2021-12-20