Tatyana Ilieva

Cyrillo-Methodian Research Centre
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8480-5276

A Great Loss for Bulgarian Community of Paleo-Slavic Studies: Georgi Popov

The end of every human life is an occasion to evaluate the merits of the one who passed away. If this person was a truly devoted scientist, it is time to pay due respect to the scholar and person who has left us forever.

April 8, 2023 was the last day of the earthly journey of Prof. Georgi Popov, DSc. It is our duty on this solemn occasion to inform the scientific community about the life and creative path of one of the leading authorities in modern Slavic Medieval Studies.

The path that Prof. Dr. Georgi Popov walked all his life started in the family of a priest in Asenovgrad – an old fortress town in Bulgaria. This is a fact which, together with his studies at the Theological Seminary in Cherepish (near Sofia), played a huge role in the formation of his spiritual and creative nature. Precisely his deep penetration into the faith via worship and the environment

of the church music with which he grew up was the necessary prerequisite that later unlocked his scientific interest in Old Bulgarian hymnography. That was the first impulse. Others included his MA in Bulgarian Philology with a second major in Russian at Sofia University (1970), and specializations in Moscow (1977) and Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) (1980), which were combined with exceptional diligence and research patience. All of these made Georgi Popov a specialist who was capable of unraveling the centuries-old secret messages of ancient manuscripts due to his excellent qualifications in Slavic paleography, Old Bulgarian language, Byzantine and Slavic hymnography, Old Bulgarian literature and liturgy.

The chronology of the scientific biography of Prof. G. Popov began four decades ago in 1973, when, while still a high school teacher in Plovdiv (1970–1974), he became a part-time graduate student at the History of Bulgarian Language Department at the Institute of Bulgarian Language (part of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences). From 1974 to 1989, he held a full-time position in the same academic unit, initially as a specialist-philologist (1974–1976), and later as a Research Associate (1976) and a Senior Research Associate, 2nd rank (1989). In these first years of his scientific career, G. Popov was involved in the preparation of the collective work "Старобългарски речник" ["Old Bulgarian Dictionary"] (volume 1, 1999; volume 2, 2009), being engaged in clarifying some phenomena of the development of the spoken Bulgarian language, and commenting on examples from Middle Bulgarian manuscripts with liturgical content. At that time he was already irresistibly attracted by the charm of Slavic liturgical song books, especially the Triodion – a fascination never left him (Попов, 1977, 1979). Between 1993 and 2002, Prof. Popov was a member of the Cyrillo-Methodian Research Centre of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. In 2001, he was promoted to the position of a Senior Research Associate, 1st rank. Because of his high degree of professionalism and competence, he was invited to join the editorial boards of a number of scientific collections, series and periodicals, including *Palaeobulgarica* (from 2000), *Богословска мисъл* ["Theological thought"] (from 2001), and "Кирило-Методиевски студии" ["Cyrillo-Methodian Studies"] (from volume 13, 2000). He also edited a book by S. Kozhuharov "Проблеми на старобългарската поезия" ["Problems of Old Bulgarian Poetry"] (Кожухаров, 2004). He was Chairman of the Scientific Council at the Cyrillo-Methodian Research Centre BAS and a member of the Specialized Scientific Council for Linguistics and the Commission for Philological Sciences and Art Studies at the Higher Attestation Commission.

The true strength of G. Popov's research talent was manifested for the first time in his monographic work "Triodion Works by Constantine of Preslav" (Попов, 1985b), for which he was granted a Doctor of Philological Sciences degree and received the "Acad. Aleksandyr Teodorov-Balan" Award of BAS and Sofia University (1987). He established the existence of an original (untranslated) 18-verse Old Bulgarian poem through a detailed textual analysis of a large number of Triodion manuscripts that existed in the form of an acrostic, formed by the initial letters of about 440 troparia in the composition of an also original (untranslated) complete cycle of Great Lent Triptychs and Quadriptychs. The beginning of the acrostic reads: гранеса добра константинова [granesa dobra Konstantinova / Good verses by Constantine). Due to its volume and compositional strength, the poem is the only phenomenon – at least, the only one that is known – of its kind in Christian church poetry, and even in Byzantine literature. G. Popov established that this poem was the work of a Bulgarian writer who was highly educated for the time. Prof. Popov defined the acrostic praise гранеса добра константинова as one of the most significant achievements of not only Old Bulgarian but also of all medieval Christian poetry. This scientist's first great discovery was extremely highly appreciated in medievalist circles.[1] It caused a sensation in Bulgaria and around the world, representing a breakthrough in Paleo-Slavic studies.

Among the most valuable finds from the era of the Golden Age of Bulgarian Culture is the Canon of the Nativity of Christ by Constantine of Preslav, which G. Popov discovered in the composition of early Slavic manuscripts. Its rhythmic structure resembles one of the most complex examples of Byzantine ecclesiastical poetry, namely the iambic canon of the Nativity of John of Damascus. Constantine of Preslav created 24 independent troparia (strophes) of 5 verses each: the initial letters of the 120 verses form a title with a three-line poetic message to the newly converted Slavs (Попов, 1997, pp. 3–17, 1998, pp. 3–26).

Constantine of Preslav also wrote a cycle of pre-festal poems about the Epiphany. His name was read by G. Popov in a phrasal acrostic formed from the initial letters of 24 pre-festal verses for the services from January 2 to 5, namely the Hymn of Constantine's praise (Попов, 1982, pp. 3–26). A complete transcript of this cycle is preserved in Typographic No. 98, a Russian parchment Menaion from the 12th–13th centuries (Попов, 1999, pp. 3–23).

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[1] See the reviews: Bláhová (1986, pp. 408–411); Keller (1987, pp. 164–168); Станчев (1987, pp. 62–165); Трифонова (1986, pp. 30–33).

The pen of the Constantine of Preslav produced a Triptych for the pre-celebration of the Dormition, as G. Popov found out from the author's acrostic that was woven into the work (Попов, 1995a, pp. 3–31, 1995b, pp. 96–114). Thus, with his extraordinarily successful explorations, this extremely successful researcher of poetic artifacts enriched the image of Constantine of Preslav as a hymnographer.

G. Popov's contribution to establishing the hymnographic heritage is also important, as is that of another distinguished Old Bulgarian writer, Clement of Ohrid. Popov decoded an acrostic formed by the initial letters of the troparia with the name of Clement of Ohrid and indications of the purpose and musical compositional features of the work – Климента пясни прэдпразна Христову розству трипяснна осмоглас ("Hristovu rozstvu tripiasnna osmoglas" – "Songs by Clement. Prefestal triptychs for the Nativity of Christ according to the order of the Octoechos") in a cycle of six Prefestal triptychs for the Nativity of Christ (Попов, 1982, pp. 3–26). The text of the triptychs was published on the basis of Khlud Festal Menaion No. 166, dated the beginning of the 14th century (Станчев & Попов, 1988).

G. Popov ascribed another cycle of triptychs about Epiphany Eve to Clement of Ohrid. The same cycle of triptychs is found in Typographic Menaion No. 98 and in the Middle Bulgarian Skopski Menaion from the 13th century: No. 522 from NLKM (Попов, 1982, pp. 3–26). There are gaps in both transcripts, so the acrostic is only partially restored. It is a short prayer couplet, filled with images of light, as is characteristic of Clement's style: троице свата просвяти ма святом святозарно пяти ("Holy Trinity, enlighten me with light to sing glimmerously"). The incipits of the troparia according to Typographical No. 98 have been published (Попов, 1999, pp. 3–23). Relying on the fact that the Menaion alternate chants by Clement and Constantine of Preslav, G. Popov proved that the two scribes worked together and supplemented the official Menaion they translated with original chants. That probably happened soon after their arrival in Pliska and before Clement's departure for the west Bulgarian lands.

In a number of cases, additional argumentation and new archeographical data provided by G. Popov supported and clarified or refuted the opinions of other specialists. Thus, while studying *Cycle of Ordinary Time Services*, which was supposedly composed by Clement and was published by B. Angelov (based on a manuscript from the 15th century), G. Popov found that the initial letters of the troparia in the eighth and ninth cantos of the canon of the General Service

for a Saint form an acrostic with the name of the author (Попов, 1985a, p. 16), thus definitively confirming B. Angelov's hypothesis about Kliment's participation in the writing of this cycle of common services, which were so necessary at the initial stage of the spread of Slavic liturgy because there were not yet enough translated texts for all church memorials (Ангелов, 1969, pp. 237–259).

A canon partially preserved in Slavic manuscript literature, dedicated to St. Simeon the God-Receiver, was probably also created by Clement, according to G. Popov. Transcripts containing only the first four songs have reached us from him (Попов, 2000, pp. 42–57).

One of G. Popov's valuable discoveries is the three sticherons in the Service for the transfer of the relics of St. John Chrysostom; this service is related to the hymnographic heritage of St. Naum of Ohrid and was found in the Skopje Menaion. Prof. Popov found that the initial letters of the verses form the syllable kli-. The language and style of these verses is also very similar to Clement's poetic language and style. These facts lead to the conclusion that the poems are his work. Most probably the entire canon about transferring the relics with the anonymous Old Bulgarian phrase acrostic can also be attributed to him (Станчев & Попов, 1988).

Prof. Popov also found an author's acrostic by Clement in the Canon for the Glorification of the Shirt and Belt of the Holy Mother. The initial letters of the troparia in the eighth and ninth cantos of the canon form the name Clement. The text of the work was based on one of the oldest preserved Middle Bulgarian transcripts from the 13th century (Станчев & Попов, 1988).

G. Popov researched the "Service for Methodius – the First Teacher of Slavs" and revealed some important features of the structure and composition of this hymnographic work; this helped in the restoration of an acrostic with the author's signature of Clement of Ohrid (Попов, 2001, pp. 3–20).

A phrasal acrostic that runs through all the odes and contains the name Klim was read by G. Popov in the text of the Canon of St. Euthymius the Great, partially preserved in a Slavic Menaia from the 11th–13th centuries. The same canon was later revised by an unknown Bulgarian scribe and adapted for the Service of St. Joakim of Osogo. Its earliest transcript is attested in a Middle Bulgarian Festal Menaion from the 13th century (No. 113 of the National Library "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" in Sofia). Both published versions were based on the oldest preserved copies (Станчев & Попов, 1988).

The separately published observations about St. Clement's hymnographic works that were discovered by G. Popov are summarized in the book "Clement

of Ohrid. Life and work", where for the first time the results of this Bulgarian scientist's long-term studies on the ancient Bulgarian hymnographic manuscript heritage are published in a synthesized and systematic form.

St. Naum was the third student of St. St. Cyril and Methodius, so his role as a translator and author of original hymnographic works also fell within the scope of G. Popov's research interest. Summarizing the results of his research on the only reliably proven work by St. Naum so far, the Canon of St. Andrew the Apostle (Кожухаров, 1984, pp. 3–19), attested in five transcripts, G. Popov formulates the two main questions raised by the Service in Honor of St. Andrew the Apostle: What was the participation of St. Naum as an author and translator in its composition, and to whom can the other original Slavic chants in its composition be attributed? G. Popov's hypothesis is that the verses after the canon, whose Greek correspondences cannot be found and which show proximity to the canon in lexical and stylistic terms, are most likely a part of the Service for St. Andrew the Apostle, written by St. Naum (Илиева, 2010, pp. 247–253). In G. Popov's opinion, this work is not an isolated phenomenon in Old Bulgarian hymnography. He believes that its text is most likely a part of the original Menaion composition, which arose and was established in Bulgaria as a result of the joint literary activity of the students of Cyril and Methodius (Попов, 1994, pp. 10–22).

Georgi Popov found an anonymous acrostic phrase in the Epiphany Canon: богоꙗвлениꙗ ти поюще христе славим – "Epiphany your, Christ, we praise singing" (Попов, 1982, pp. 3–26). He considered the origin of this work to be directly connected to other Old Bulgarian hymns for the Nativity of Christ and Epiphany, written by the disciples of Cyril and Methodius. Like the Nativity Canon by Constantine of Preslav, this work was written following the Byzantine model – the iambic canon by John of Damascus for the Epiphany. In order to adjust the rhythm, the source Greek text of the irmos was subjected to conscious revision during the translation (Попов, 1997, pp. 3–17). The scientist found another untitled work in the Color Triod – Canon for the Sunday of Pentecost, with a hidden embedded acrostic in the troparia (Попов, 2006, pp. 3–48).

Georgi Popov found two more manuscripts, Typographical No. 131 from the 12th century and Typographical No. 98, in which there are copies of the four cycles of alphabetic verses dedicated to the celebration of the Nativity and Epiphany that were previously discovered by K. Ivanova in two Middle Bulgarian festal menaia from the 13th and 14th centuries.

All four cycles reflect the peculiarities of the Glagolitic alphabet, which is important evidence of their ancient Old Bulgarian origin. Most likely, they arose in connection with the formation of the festive menaia in the process of the joint literary activity of the students of Cyril and Methodius in Bulgaria (Попов, 1982, pp. 3–26).

Being an excellent connoisseur of Byzantine hymn poetry, G. Popov not only discovered all the above-mentioned works but also determined the principles of their construction, their Greek samples, and the specifics of their language. For many of these, he proved that they were written in the Glagolitic alphabet, as a result of which ideas about the role of Glagolitic script in the Old Bulgarian era changed. His works, in addition to revealing a new chapter of the creativity of Old Bulgarian verse, are also a contribution to Byzantology because they show the reception of Byzantine poetry in Slavic culture not only via translations, but also as models for active innovations.

A vivid expression of the high public regard for Prof. Popov's great scientific achievements and fundamental contributions in the field of Old Bulgarian Studies is the numerous prestigious awards he received: certificate and jubilee medal "1300 years of Bulgaria" (1981); BAS Distinction Badge (1982), the "Kliment Ohridski" Medal (1985); Cyril-Methodian Award (1989); the Award for Significant Scientific Achievements of the Scientific Research Fund at the Ministry of Education and Culture (1998); Honorary Badge of Sofia University with a blue ribbon (2008).

Inseparable from the research career of Prof. Dr. G. Popov is also his pedagogical activity in Bulgaria and abroad. He worked as a part-time lecturer in Old Bulgarian language and the history of the Bulgarian language at Plovdiv University (1976–1988); in Church Slavonic language and Old Bulgarian literature at the Theological Faculty of Sofia University (from 1999), and in Church Slavonic language at the New Bulgarian University in Sofia (from 1999). During the period 1988–1992, he was a lecturer in Bulgarian language at the Institute of Slavic Studies at the University of Salzburg, Austria, where at the same time he supervised seminars on Old Bulgarian poetry, Slavic paleography and textology, and lectures on Old Bulgarian grammar, history of the Bulgarian language and modern Bulgarian language, and Bulgarian dialectology. In 2002, he became a full professor at the Theological Faculty of Sofia University. He supervised PhD students and specialists. Always ready to share his wealth of experience and knowledge with anyone, he was a sought-after consultant in the academic community.

The active civic position of Prof. G. Popov is evident in his many media appearances, in which he promoted his discoveries to the general public and posed important questions affecting the state of culture in modern Bulgaria. And last but not least, I will note the wonderful qualities that Prof. Georgi Popov, DSc possessed as a person. Through the intervening decades of glory and triumph, he remained ever so dedicated, humble, always kind and warm-hearted – a true teacher and man.

This text is a tribute to his bright memory.

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Wielka strata dla bułgarskich badań paleoslawistycznych – Georgi Popov

Artykuł ma charakter nekrologu i stanowi przegląd kariery zawodowej oraz dzieła znanego paleoslawisty i badacza kultury i języka starobułgarskiego, Georgiego Popova (15.07.1943–08.04.2023).

A great loss for Bulgarian community of Paleo-Slavic studies: Georgi Popov

As an obituary, the paper offers an overview of the professional career and work of this well-known scholar of palaeoslavistics and Old Bulgarian studies, Georgi Popov (15.07.1943–08.04.2023).

Tatyana Ilieva (ilieva_tatyana@abv.bg) – profesor nadzwyczajna w Centrum Badań Cyrylo-Metodejskich Bułgarskiej Akademii Nauk; specjalista z zakresu filologii klasycznej i teologii. Autorka książek: *Книга на пророк Иезекиил с тълкования* [Księga proroka Ezechiela z interpretacjami, 2003; współautorstwo: L. Taseva, L. Yovcheva]; *Старобългарско-гръцки словоуказател към Книгата на пророк Иезекиил* [Leksykon starobułgarsko-grecki do Księgi proroka Ezechiela, 2013]; *Терминологичната лексика в Йоан-Екзарховия превод на „De fide ortodoxa"* [Słownictwo terminologiczne w tłumaczeniu „De fide ortodoxa" autorstwa Jana Egzarchy, 2013]. Niedawno odkryła dotychczas nieznane południowosłowiańskie tłumaczenie traktatu *O świątyni Bożej* autorstwa Symeona z Tessaloniki. Zainteresowania badawcze: leksykologia i leksykografia starobułgarska, problemy średniowiecznych przekładów słowiańskich z języka greckiego bizantyjskiego, a zwłaszcza starobułgarskiego przekładu Starego Testamentu, lingwostatystyka, lingwokulturologia, teologia.

Tatyana Ilieva (ilieva_tatyana@abv.bg) – associate professor at the Cyrillo-Methodian Research Centre at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences; specialist in Classical philology and theology. Author of the books: *Книга на пророк Иезекиил с тълкования* [Book of the Prophet Ezekiel with Interpretations, 2003; with L. Taseva and L. Yovcheva]; *Старобългарско-гръцки словоуказател към Книгата на пророк Иезекиил* [The Old Bulgarian-Greek Lexicon to the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, 2013]; *Терминологичната лексика в Йоан-Екзарховия превод на “De fide orthodoxa”* [The Terminological Vocabulary in John the Exarch's Translation of “De Fide Orthodoxa”, 2013]. She recently discovered a previously unknown summarized South Slavic translation of the *Explanation of the Divine Temple* treatise by Simeon of Thessaloniki. Research interests: Old Bulgarian lexicology and lexicography, problems of medieval Slavonic translations from Byzantine Greek language and especially of the Old Bulgarian translation of the Old Testament, linguostatistics, linguoculturology, theology.